

EXCLUSIVE: UNRAVELING ROQUE BELLO

NEWSBREAK

We Make Sense of the News

APRIL 10, 2006 **Php75**

GEMS IN GOVERNMENT

Young people choose
public service over money

ISSN 1655-2199



4 806507 570291



THE LINDEN SUITES

Relax. Soothe. Revitalize.

Avail of our Health Club membership at a special annual rate of Php10,000 plus a monthly fee of Php999. Enjoy unlimited use of the heated indoor pool, gym, sauna and jacuzzi. Because you deserve the best that life has to offer...only at The Linden Suites.

Experience the difference.

37 San Miguel Avenue, Ortigas Center, Pasig City 1600, Philippines
Tel. Nos.: (632) 638 7878 • Facsimile: (632) 638 7877
E-mail: sales@lindensuites.com • Website: www.swiss-belhotel.com

 **swiss-belHOTEL INTERNATIONAL**

Magandang araw mula sa San Miguel

Sa pagsisikap, natutupad ang maraming pangarap. Alam ng San Miguel ito. Kaya naman sinisikap nito na gawing mas masarap, mas maginhawa ang bawat araw. Ikinataguyod ang mga programang nakatutulong sa pagpapaligid ng buhay at kabuhayan. Tula ng "Operation Linis Taal" sa Batangas na nangangalaga sa kalusugan ng mga isda doon. At ang "Tulong-tulong sa Tullahan" na muling binubuhay ang Tullahan River para sa kapakanan ng mga taga-Malabon at Valenzuela. At siyempre, mahusay na gumagawa ang San Miguel Corporation ng mga de-kalidad at abot-kayang mga produkto para sa bawat Pilipino.



SAN MIGUEL CORPORATION

Hello, Roque

IN THE issue before this (NEWSBREAK, March 27, 2006), we ran a one-page story with photographs of the alleged faking of election returns for President Arroyo. The pictures were given to us by a long-time source who was also one of our sources for a big story we did on cheating in the 2004 elections last year (Sept. 12, 2005).

Reacting to this, Commission on Elections (COMELEC) chairman Benjamin Abalos told reporters that NEWSBREAK should submit all the information we had so they could conduct an investigation on alleged cheating by the administration. If we didn't do so, he said, then we were merely engaging in propaganda.

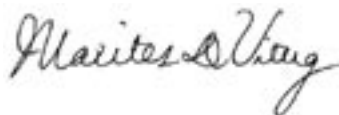
I'm afraid Mr. Abalos is passing the buck to us. On his own, based on everything that we've published on cheating in the 2004 elections, he can task the COMELEC to dig up the facts further and arrive at conclusions. But rather than face the issue, Mr. Abalos conveniently passes the burden to the media.

It's a puzzle to me that government officials call the messengers rather than the subjects of the stories when they do their investigations.

Our stories speak for themselves and all that we know are in the public domain, both in our hard copies as well as on our website (*www.newsbreak.com.ph*). Honestly, if Mr. Abalos were truly interested in arriving at the truth, he would have gone to the bottom of all this a long time ago. Way before the "Hello, Garci" tapes were made public, we'd been running stories on election cheating.

In this issue, our assistant managing editor, Miriam Grace A. Go, who has been hot on the trail of election operators, writes yet another piece that clarifies how pre- and post-election fraud is done. After Virgilio Garcillano, we get to meet a man in the same league, Roque Bello. And just like Garcillano, who is his friend, Bello has surfaced after a long silence perhaps to deflect attention away from President Arroyo. He gives us slivers of the truth but leaves us with more questions.

One thing is clear, though: the election cheating issue refuses to die. Close to two years after we voted President Arroyo into office, the legitimacy question still hovers above her. And we doubt if she's alone in that situation.



You can reach Marites Dañguilan Vitug at: **marites@newsbreak.com.ph**

NEWSBREAK

PHILIPPINE COPYRIGHT 2001 NEWSBREAK PUBLISHING, INC.

JOSE M. GALANG JR.

Publisher

MARITES DAÑGUILAN VITUG

Editor in Chief

GLENDA M. GLORIA

Managing Editor

MIRIAM GRACE A. GO

Assistant Managing Editor

LALA RIMANDO

Business Editor

R.E. OTICO

JOSE DALISAY JR.

Editorial Consultants

ARIES RUFO

Senior Writer

GEMMA B. BAGAYUA

CARMELA S. FONBUENA

Staff Writers

LUIS LIWANAG

Chief Photographer

LeANNE JAZUL

Art Director

MA-AN B. HONTIVEROS

Managing Director

MENCHIE ADIVOSO

Circulation & Subscription Supervisor

MIGUEL FRANCO E. MARCO

Marketing Executive

MERCY ABAD

JOSE P. DE JESUS

FEDERICO MACARANAS

JO-ANN MAGLIPON

JUNIE DEL MUNDO

Advisory Board

PUBLISHED FORTNIGHTLY BY NEWSBREAK PUBLISHING INC., WITH EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES AT UNIT 502, GABRIEL III, AMETHYST DRIVE, ORTIGAS CENTER, 1600 PASIG CITY, PHILIPPINES

TELEPHONES: (632) 687-5523; 687-5525
FAX: (632) 687-5528

E-MAIL: editorial@newsbreak.com.ph
TELEPHONES: (632) 687-5521; 687-5524; 687-2255
FAX: (632) 687-5528

CIRCULATION: circulation@newsbreak.com.ph
SUBSCRIPTIONS: subscription@newsbreak.com.ph
MARKETING/ADVERTISING: ads@newsbreak.com.ph

AN ELECTRONIC VERSION IS AVAILABLE AT
<http://www.newsbreak.com.ph>

TO ORDER REPRINTS (MINIMUM ORDER REQUIRED: 500 COPIES) OR REQUEST PERMISSION TO REPUBLISH A NEWSBREAK ARTICLE/S, PLEASE CALL (632) 687-5521



Keep building.

45 years of Moving forward!

To move our country forward, we must help each other.

In partnership with Gawad Kalinga, RCBC is building decent homes starting with an RCBC Village in Baseco Compound, Tondo, Manila.

From this commitment, many lives will be changed,
many lives will move forward.



MEMBER: Philippine Deposit Insurance Corp.
Maximum deposit insurance per depositor P=₱ 250,000.





MILITARY

COUPS, CO-OPS, AND CHICKEN COOPS

What's all the fuss about military co-ops? 13

EASY MONEY

When charity and politics mix 14

THERE ARE 300, SO FAR

To cope with the hard times, soldiers have created many co-ops. 15

CURRENT AFFAIRS

UNRAVELING BELLO

The controversial election operator speaks up 16

Two Sides to a Story 17

Q and A with Bello 18

COVER STORY

GEMS IN GOVERNMENT

Four young people tell us why they've chosen to work in government. 19



FOREIGN AFFAIRS

A LONG STAY

An American task force has never left in Mindanao since 2001 23

BUSINESS

WEAR YOUR SNEAKERS IN MAY

This you've got to see: Mall of Asia. 25

TALL ORDER

Meet the young man who will manage the new mall. 27



TECHNOLOGY

ONLINE DATING

It works for busy people. 30

SECTIONS

OUR PICK 8

HOT SEAT Avelino Cruz, Jr. 11

COMMENTARY 28

FIRST PERSON Eric Gutierrez 32

LIFE & STYLE

Hot Tips 33

Food Review 34

Travel Turkey 35

INSIDE TRACK 37



ABOUT THE COVER

Young and promising, Rommel Romato works at the Office of the Ombudsman.
COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY LUIS LIWANAG

'WOWOWEE' FAN

I THINK they should put back that "Wowowee" show, especially on the Filipino Channel (NEWSBREAK, March 13, 2006). A lot of people enjoy the show. I am from San Diego California and all of us, even my kids who were born, laugh, and are sometimes touched by the people who are in need and who guest in the show.

If the government can't do anything, maybe the shows can.

T. MARIJANA

tmari@sdcoe.net
San Diego, California

WE DESERVE BETTER

THE KIND of politicians we have today is also the kind of Filipinos we are. Had we gotten rid of those "trapos" after EDSA, we wouldn't be experiencing this economic crisis (NEWSBREAK, Feb. 13, 2006). I believe that the only way to change and reform our politicians is to change and reform first the Filipinos.

We have no alternative but to make sacrifices, even offering our lives for the future of a new generation of Filipinos that will be governed by public officials with integrity beyond reproach.

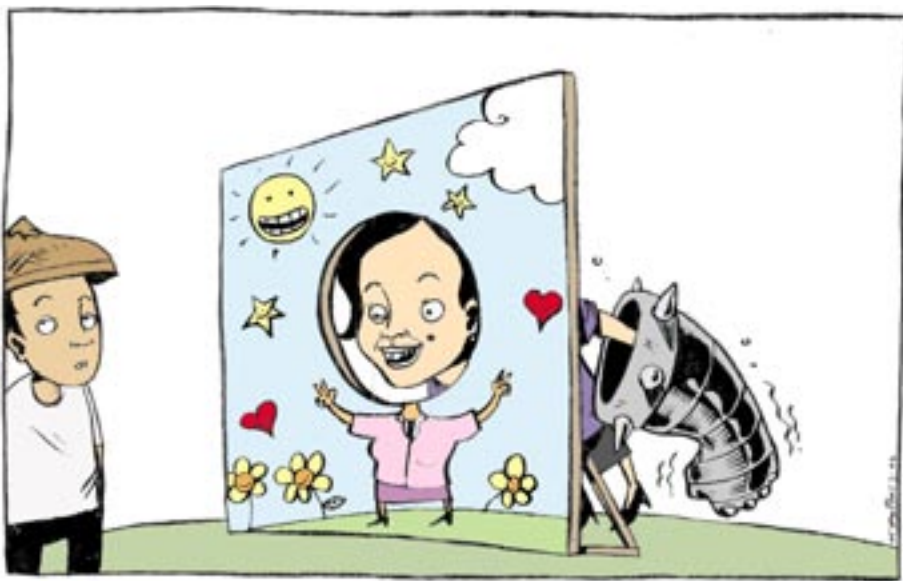
GERRY BALISTA

Quezon City
GerryB@dar.gov.ph

WE NEED to be able to express that we who are Christians are also enraged by such behavior of Mr. Franklin Graham (NEWSBREAK, Feb. 13, 2006). He has jeopardized the lives of people of the country that has hosted him. This only shows that he really does not care for the people of this country but he wants only to use the Philippines for his hate campaign. He is known as a staunch supporter of Mr. Bush so I am not surprised by his pronouncements.

VERONICA ESTER MENDOZA

Manila



HEED THOSE TIPS

YOU ARE right on every single item you covered in your article ("Selling Condos to Fil-Ams," NEWSBREAK, March 27, 2006). I'm one of those Fil-Ams who had a not-so-pleasant experience while checking out condos there. The developers must provide their agents plenty of Customer Satisfaction Training and use your article as a guide.

The agents need to learn the answers to the most basic questions like the proximity of the condo to a hospital and grocery store. Not one of my questions regarding building codes and construction materials was answered. At one presentation I attended, I was given a photocopied handout with scribbles on it. It was so hard to read I threw it away on my way out.

After living and working in the Stockton/Sacramento area for over 30 years, my husband and I decided to retire in the Pacific Northwest. We will still visit the Philippines but buying a condo there is no longer in our future plans. I've forwarded your article to some of my Fil-Am friends and relatives who are

contemplating buying a condo in the Philippines someday.

I hope your important tips are heeded.

GLENDA M. BALDWIN

1805 Bear Creek Road
Port Angeles WA 98363

CALL FOR ENTRIES IN FILIPINO

NEWSBREAK and the World Bank are calling for entries to the essay-writing contest on the theme of development with equity—in Filipino.

Entries must be in Filipino and expound on "Development with Equity" in the Philippines, or a particular aspect/issue of inequity in the Philippine setting—discussing its causes, effects, or manifestations, and directions for addressing the issue.

The deadline is March 31, 2006.

Essays should have a maximum of 1,000 words. Please indicate your full name and contact

details (address, telephone number, fax and e-mail) in a transmittal letter.

Entries will be evaluated based on the following criteria: depth of understanding, treatment of issue, and composition (flow, clarity, style).

Finalists will be notified in May 2006. Winners will be announced on May 27, 2006.

Please submit entries to: Panibagong Paraan 2006 Secretariat, 23/F Taipan Place, F. Ortigas Jr. Road, Ortigas Center, Pasig City 1605. Email: dimp@worldbank.org. ■



INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM TRAINING FOR NEWSBREAK WRITER



NEWSBREAK senior writer **Aries Rufo** is on a 20-day trip to the US as the only Filipino journalist on the US government's annual International Visitor Leadership Program. He joins 20 other journalists from Asia, South Africa, and Latin America.

"The program will expose participants to a variety of investigative reporting forums. These forums could range from major newspaper and television operations to public interest advocacy groups and issues aired on public and talk show radio."

The journalists are visiting American media organizations in Washington, Philadelphia, Ohio, and San Francisco. They will have the chance to meet with top investigative writers and editors in the US and

discuss with them issues such as covering corruption and the courts, covering health care, and investigative reporting on business and economics. ■



ALBAY: A MODEL IN LOCAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT

MT. MAYON is known for emitting deadly pyroclastic flows which travel at speeds of as much as 300 kilometers per hour. Its deadliest eruption, which happened in 1814, killed 1,200 people, buried a church, and devastated several towns.

Living at the foot of the volcano has since inspired the people of Albay to prepare at all times for an impending disaster. A six-kilometer-radius permanent danger zone that is permanently off-limits to people has been set up.

Five alert level warnings

were established, each level corresponding to a recommended disaster response measure on the part of the Albay Provincial Disaster Coordinating Council, which operates through the Provincial Public Safety and Emergency Management Office.

There have been no casualties in the area following the consecutive eruptions of Mayon Volcano in 2000 and 2001. Albay is now a model in the country for excellence in the local and community level disaster management.

— **Gemma B. Bagayaua**

Verbatim

TONY KWOK is former head of the Hong Kong-based International Commission Against Corruption, which is credited for helping reduce corruption in the former British colony. He is now consultant for the European Union-funded anti-corruption program of the Ombudsman in the Philippines. **NEWSBREAK** senior writer Aries Rufo spoke with him on February 22. Excerpts from the interview:

Based on your experience,

what is the best way to combat corruption?

There is no best way; there is no single solution in fighting corruption. One solution is to have an effective enforcement, to arrest or to imprison all these corrupt officials as a deterrent to others. One can also look at institutional reforms, to make the institution more transparent, more accountable.

No country can possibly totally eradicate corruption. You can just lessen it to an acceptable level. Why? Because corruption is derived from

BLOGGING THE PRESIDENT

SELECTIVE AMNESIA

By **JOVE FRANCISCO**

WAS unable to listen to Mike Enriquez's interview with the President, but someone texted me that day to say, "*Lola mo, inookray ang dos* (The President is hitting ABS-CBN, Channel 2)." I was able to read the whole interview, and got reminded of my theory that this administration has selective amnesia.

The President sang praises to one network although she conveniently forgot the Tina Panganiban Perez (of GMA 7) incident. Yup, the aftermath of that Gringo Honasan exclusive interview (in 2003). I still remember how she treated Tina and how her station was put on the receiving end of tirades from the Palace.

I'm not raising this to lambaste GMA 7. I supported Tina back then and defended her network to industry outsiders. I'm simply reminding everyone that at

the time, it would have been impossible for the President to describe GMA 7 as "*nagbabatikos pero hindi seditious* (critical but not seditious)," or Enriquez as "*huwarang* broadcaster (model broadcaster)."

I remember how PGMA apologized to Tina and GMA7 and when she hosted dinner for the media that time to show everyone that she was not "suppressing freedom of the press." The bosses of Tina attended, and they all wore black. They had every right to do so. They were the targets that time.

Now, she's targeting media groups that she believes are critical of her. Enemies of the state, she calls 'em, specifically the *Daily Tribune* and ABS-CBN.

But I remember how she guested on many news and entertainment programs on ABS-CBN when she deemed it convenient and useful, especially before the 2004 elections and during her first months as President in 2001.

Don't you remember those



And they said...



“There was no coup. It is not true that I am involved in an alliance with the Left.”

BRIG. GEN. DANILO LIM, sacked commander of the Army's Scout Rangers

“We will see to it that Thai people don't drink Nescafé coffee or buy goods at 7-Eleven convenient stores.”

PARNTHOP PURPONGAN, spokesperson for an anti-Thaksin coalition in Thailand which threatened to boycott companies linked to embattled Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra

“It's odd, although naturally it is possible, that he died unexpectedly without the doctors noticing that his health had suddenly worsened.”

CARLA DEL PONTE, chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, on the death of accused war criminal Slobodan Milosevic in prison



times when ABS-CBN got first crack at her reactions to many developments? Korina Sanchez and even Boy Abunda, *di ba?* Then, everything changed. I remember how ABS-CBN was placed last in the line-up of broadcast media groups during the media blitz, post-Glorigate. Imagine, for the very first time in history (since I joined Channel 5) ABC 5 was given the second slot in the long line of “live interviews,” second only to GMA 7.

This is about how this administration treats the media. At least during the time when Tina was the issue, PGMA didn't

use her favorite network then, ABS-CBN, to attack “the enemy.” Nowadays, the tack seems to be this: agree to an exclusive interview, then PGMA, with her OPS (Office of the Press Secretary) people troop to the station, say what she wants to say, read from her notes (yes, she read from her notes again, like when she guested on Joe Taruc's radio program last February 14. Incidentally, she also criticized ABS at the time over the “Wowowee” incident), lambaste people while praising the host and the network concerned.

This is like fanning the flames

of the bitter network war.

Mrs. President, please refrain from using a media group to criticize another. We may not always believe in the battles you choose, but we respect your right to do so. But please fight your own battles without using any of our kind as a shield. ■

Reporter and prolific blogger Jove Francisco covers Malacañang for ABC 5. His blogs provide insights into details about the daily goings-on in the Palace. See <http://jovefrancisco.com/>. This particular blog, slightly edited here, appeared last March 8.

greed, and if nobody is greedy, then there is no corruption. It's just like death. You can reduce death, but you cannot totally refuse death in any place.

What's the ideal budget for the Ombudsman?

If the government believes that fighting corruption is a very important matter, they have to be ready to give a certain percentage. And that percentage if you look at it from another angle, can be some kind of insurance premium. In order for you to collect the right amount, or spend the right amount of

money, you pay for some kind of insurance premium as a watchdog.

Did you threaten to quit after Ombudsman Marcelo left?

I was asked for my comment on his resignation and I said I hope it's not due to any other reasons. And I said I don't think I want to stay behind. I didn't really say I want to resign, I just mentioned that.

So you don't intend to resign?

I think that would be quite irresponsible if I do that. I am committed to this two-

year project and there are a lot of activities and they are moving quite well. If we push through with all these activities, it will have an impact on the anti-corruption scene in the Philippines. I think it is my responsibility to try to see it through....I am also pleased that she (the President) made a pledge that she will continue with the action plan of Marcelo. Which means she is on the right track. But she will have to be judged on what she will do in the long term. ■

BAND OF BROTHERS

The restiveness in the Marine Corps has calmed down. But for how long?

By MARITES DAÑGUILAN VITUG

IN A dialogue with Navy chief Vice Admiral Mateo Mayuga a couple of days after the February 26 standoff in Fort Bonifacio, about 40 junior officers of the Marine Corps aired two big concerns. First, that the Marines be insulated from politics. They cited the immediate relief of their previous commandant, Maj. Gen. Renato Miranda, as a decision that could have possibly been made with “external intervention.” They did not say who or what groups could have influenced Mayuga.

Second, they wanted to know why the turnover of command to their new commandant, Brig. Gen. Nelson Allaga, was stripped of the proper ritual and ceremony. They had no objections to their new commandant; it was really the way the change in leadership was done, as if in a huff.

(After Miranda, who was supposedly part of the rebel plan to withdraw support from President Arroyo, asked to be relieved, Allaga was named the new commandant in quick and simple turnover rites at Navy Headquarters on the afternoon of February 26, Sunday. Soon after, the six-hour standoff began.)

The dialogue, held at the Marine Corps Training Center in Fort Bonifacio on February 28, did not touch on the May 2004 elections and the Garci tapes; neither were there discussions on what really transpired on February 23 and 24, when Army Brig. Gen. Danilo Lim and Marine Col. Ariel Querubin planned to lead their troops in a march on EDSA and break the chain of command.

But the dialogue worked. NEWSBREAK learned from various sources in the Marines that Mayuga handled the questions well and the junior officers were satisfied with his answers. (Mayuga declined to be interviewed for this story; so did the Marines spokesman Maj. Melquiades Ordiales. The officers who spoke to us requested that their identities not be disclosed.) The Navy chief, who

told the officers that he did not fully trust Miranda (after the failed coup), took full responsibility for the decision to swiftly change commandants.

“It was like a father-son discussion,” an officer privy to the meeting said. “We believe in what the father says.”

Thus, weeks after the standoff in Fort Bonifacio, the restiveness in the Marine Corps appears to have calmed down. We received reports that some staff officers in the Headquarters sympathetic to Miranda were planning to resign from the service, but



LUIS LIWANANG

no one, so far, has pushed through with it. Allaga, NEWSBREAK learned, has prevailed upon these men to stay.

We spoke to Allaga on the telephone but he refused to answer most of our questions. However, he said there were no resignations and that the Corps is “united and loyal to the Constitution.”

Meantime, the Marines have started their investigation into the events of February 23 and 24, led by deputy commandant Brig. Gen. Romeo Abayan and inspector general Col. Cesario Atienza.

What is playing out in the Marine Corps is that conflicts are resolved through old-fashioned dialogue and by holding on to tradition. After the public display of emotion and confusion that Sunday, covered live on national television, the men of the Corps have resolved to be united.

It may seem baffling to outsiders that the dialogue focused not on getting to the bottom of things but on calling on tradition

to keep the Corps united. The Marines are proud of their esprit de corps and they always like to say that they are relevant only when they’re one. This means that they take care of their own, preferring to resolve problems within the Corps.

“Our message is: don’t mess with the Marines,” the officer said. “Otherwise, there will be no end to outside intervention.”

It is also surprising that the informal turnover ceremony rankled many of the officers. Usually, the change of command is accompanied by an elaborate ritual that shows respect for the position: the commander’s flag is held down, he relinquishes the post in full view of family, friends, and the officers and their men. It is a significant moment that forms part of their tradition.

“Take away their tradition and what’s left?” says Robert Lee, who was formerly with the Navy. “It’s what binds them. They’re the culture that sets them apart from others.”

Traditions are usually strong in elite units like the Marines who are relatively small (about 8,000) and are usually the front-line fighting force. They are expected to have a higher level of discipline, more brawn, and their common combat experiences in the battlefield intensify their bond.

Some in the Armed Forces have started to question the existence of elite units—in the light of the Marines’ and the Army’s Scout Rangers’ consistent participation in coup attempts. Their ability to mobilize is usually faster because they’re tight units; their organization is akin to a brotherhood.

During his time, AFP chief of staff Gen. Efren Abu trimmed down the size of the Rangers as well as the Army’s Special Forces.

But others say there is still a need for elite units because of the threats from terrorists and insurgents. In the Philippine setting, though, the Marines and the Scout Rangers operate in a politicized environment.

That is the crux of the problem. ■

There were very clear overt actions that violated the Articles of War

The usually low-key **DEFENSE SECRETARY AVELINO CRUZ JR.** has been in the spotlight after the failed coup. He spoke to **NEWSBREAK** editors Marites Dañguilan Vitug and Glenda M. Gloria and contributor Roel Landingin on a wide range of issues. Excerpts:

Were the events of February 23 and 24 a coup?

They [Brig. Gen. Danilo Lim and Col. Ariel Querubin] asked permission to break ranks, to provide an armed component to the civilians, and to withdraw support from the commander in chief.

Were they trying to convince the chief of staff to join them?

No, to the best of my recollection. That's why there is a fact-finding investigation going on.

As reported to me by Gen. [Generoso] Senga, Lim and Querubin went to see him to ask permission to break from the chain of command and with a handful of soldiers, they were going to march on EDSA. Senga tried to dissuade them, it was a long meeting. When he assessed that they were going to push through, then he ordered that they submit themselves to the control of the chief of staff.

Shouldn't they have been arrested right away?

That's a judgment call. We leave it to the field commanders to make the decision based on circumstances.

It looks like weak leadership on the part of Senga.

Senga has effective leadership. It was a tactical situation. He was trying to resolve the situation in such a way that could best avoid a potential violent result.



LUIS LIWANANG

There is a line emerging from Lim, etc. that there was no coup, no overt action.

But there were very clear overt actions that violated the Articles of War. There will be

a pre-trial investigation to be conducted by the AFP inspector general and facts will be established.

They say it was non-violent.

Asking permission from

the chief of staff to march in a protest with a handful of soldiers and to plan to withdraw support from the commander in chief—that's a violation of the Articles of War. The act of Ariel Querubin in protesting the relief of the marine commandant and asking civilians to support him is an overt act—this should be the subject of a pre-trial investigation.

There's a problem with an internal investigation. The culture is fraternal, they protect their own.

What I experience in my camp visits is that there is a strong sentiment that the military be insulated from partisan politics, that those who violate the Constitution should be made to suffer the military justice system. When we were in CENTCOM [Central Visayas Command], there was a battalion commander who asked a question along those lines. There was an eruption of spontaneous and strong applause when he expressed that sentiment, that those who violate the Constitution be punished according to the Articles of War. They were saying that those who break the law seem to be getting more attention than those who are quietly doing their job.

Do you agree that a crackdown will lead to more restiveness in the AFP?

If habitual delinquents were made to suffer the military justice system, there will be less likelihood that these incidents will happen again. I have the benefit of hindsight. It was clear ever since I came to the DND in 2004 that the correct path to take is for violators of Articles of War to suffer the consequences of the military justice system. We tried the path of rehabilitating them. It didn't work.

What, to you, are the roots of this restiveness?

Valid concerns. One of them is lack of housing. Intuitively, it might be very mundane, but

housing problem is a recurring concern.

We're trying to do a climatic survey with scientific basis so we can address these concerns. A scientific survey will tell us the priority concerns of officers and soldiers so we can effectively implement reforms. But for habitual delinquents, no amount of reforms will change them.

Second, it's lack of mission-essential equipment. That's obvious. And lack of training. **How about the promotion of officers?**

The tug of war is promotion based on performance versus promotion based on seniority. We hope to address this in the new National Defense Act. It will set criteria for promotion which should be more on performance rather than on seniority.

How about the election issue, the Garci tapes?

There are two ways to address it: moving forward, establish the principle that the military should be insulated from politics. What has happened in the past should be based on evidence. If with evidence, we have the Comelec and the courts to deal with it.

We tried [insulating the soldiers from politics] in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao elections in 2005. The military should only be where there are armed threats. They shouldn't be canvassing, counting votes. We shouldn't use soldiers to transport election paraphernalia. They're not to be given poll duties. The President, together with the national security cluster, approved this in principle. **What about closure on the Garci tapes?**

It's important to have evidence-based decision-making process. What's clear: there are no sacred cows, no sacrificial lambs. No whitewash, no witchhunt. **Are you saying that the**

Mayuga report does not present evidence on alleged cheating by military officers in the 2004 elections?

If there's evidence, then we'll act on the report. I'm evaluating it and will submit my recommendations to the President. It's not my judgment call—it's the commander in chief's.

Are you satisfied with the Mayuga report?

I will be submitting a written report to the President as quickly as I can.

Aren't you excited by the Mayuga report? Or is it a dud?

I've been a lawyer for a long time. I don't get excited by documents.



You don't expect this to be the end of coups and destabilization attempts.

Let the military justice system punish those who violate the law and reforms should be implemented as vigorously as possible under the PDR (Philippine Defense Reform). These will create a professional and mission-capable AFP and mutinies and coups will be a thing of the past. The trajectory of the threat is downwards. The sentiment in the AFP is against this desire to grab power.

One thing has been forgotten: the accountability of officers responsible for the wiretapping of Virgilio Garcillano. Shouldn't intelligence reforms take off from this?

Intelligence reforms are a

key component. I've directed the heads of the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP) and AFP intelligence—they have a good track record—to focus on the primary mandate of anti-insurgency and anti-terrorism. We're not supposed to be involved in anti-kidnapping and anti-smuggling. That's for the police.

They're now working on a 10-year plan to improve the ISAFP and other intelligence agencies. **Isn't finding out who ordered the wiretap and what happened in ISAFP crucial to reforming the intelligence agencies?**

That's important. But

Let the military justice system punish those who violate the law and reforms should be implemented as vigorously as possible under the PDR.

equally important are the reforms going forward. That's my focus, the 10-year plan. We're getting help from Department of Defense in the US in coming up with the plan.

But there was no real effort to investigate the wiretap.

That's subjective. People can honestly disagree on that point.

What's the rule on military cooperatives?

What's important is that there should be a general application

of benefits, not specific to individuals. Second, this should not intrude into the principle of insulating the AFP from politics. We need a clearer policy.

Can you fast track the reforms?

We're trying our best but we're addressing capability gaps that have happened over the last 50 years.

How serious a setback is the failed coup on the reforms?

Rather than set it back, it clarified the need for reforms. I've been making these proposals...suddenly people are interested. Now, there's an urgency.

How about strengthening the grievance mechanism?

One of the principal functions of the inspector general is to conduct climatic surveys regularly. Not a single one has been done before. The grievance mechanism should be pro-active. The best is through scientific surveys, focused group discussions. This will be an intelligent basis for decision-making. This is the first time...we started the process in September 2005. This should be done every year.

When I came here, there was no data!

The President is going to do her own FGD.

No, she will wait for this. We've clarified this with Mike Defensor.

Aren't you worried that we're seeing, so far, the broadest anti-Arroyo movement, as shown by the alliances in the failed coup? The communists have engaged the rebel soldiers.

It requires vigilance. But if you look at it historically, we're in the early stages of nation-building. You go through these. It's important that we stick to the principles of a democratic and republican system, separation of Church and State, insulating the military from partisan politics, removing the temptation of civilians giving civilian work to the military. ■

LUIS LIWANAG



PAUL MATA

COUPS, CO-OPS, AND CHICKEN COOPS

Suddenly, the defense department is taking a second look at how military co-ops are being run

By **GEMMA B. BAGAYAU**

COOPERATIVES soliciting funds in order to offer more services to their members. A charitable foundation that granted their request by giving them millions of pesos. What's wrong with these?

Nothing, unless it can be proved that the money was spent to finance a coup plot against the current administration.

At the center of the controversy are two cooperatives: the Scout Rangers Multi-Purpose Cooperative and the Marine Corps Multi-Purpose Cooperatives. Most of the members of these two organizations are active officers and men of the military's elite units, the First Scout Ranger Regiment and the Marine Corps. Recently, both co-ops received millions of pesos in donations from the Saludo sa Kawal Pilipino Foundation, a charitable organization headed by Beaver Lopez, son-in-law of ousted President Joseph Estrada.

The donation—made last December and January—would not have raised eyebrows if not for the alleged participation of key Ranger and Marine officers in the failed

coup against President Arroyo last February. The Rangers' co-op, through its manager Army Capt. Clifford Cordova, received the check worth P4 million from Saludo sa Kawal on Dec. 24, 2005. The check for the Marines' co-op, worth P3 million, was released over a week later on Jan. 6, 2006.

Certain details in the transaction involving the Marines' co-op initially caught the interest of police investigators. The letter of solicitation to the Saludo sa Kawal Foundation, signed by the co-op's chairman Navy Col. Orlando Udujan, was dated Dec. 28, 2005. The letter did not specify any sum needed. Considering the huge amount involved, the request was processed with what seemed like inordinate speed as far as the investigators were concerned. The check was received through Col. Ariel Querubin, one of the Marine officers allegedly involved in the coup plot. Querubin's wife, Maria Flor, was later quoted in news reports to have admitted that a representative of the foundation picked up the solicitation letter from their home.

Officials of both co-ops insist that the whole transaction was aboveboard. Proof of this, they say, is that the donated monies

are still almost intact in the banks. Even the National Police Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG), which was tasked to investigate the failed coup and its possible financiers, found no unusual disbursements in the balance sheets of both organizations.

The funds appear to serve a noble purpose. Both organizations are fairly new and are in need of help in order to offer more services to their members—mostly lowly paid, ordinary soldiers. The Rangers' co-op was organized only in 2003, while the Marines' co-op was organized the following year.

LOANS FOR TROOPS

The Rangers' co-op has 2,000 members, while the Marines' co-op has 500. They provide emergency loans with reasonable interest rates. In a report carried on the Marine Corps' Web site, Col. Orlando Udujan, chair of the cooperative's board of directors, reported that as of May last year, the co-op had processed and granted about P1.5 million in emergency loans averaging P1,000 each.

"Outside, interest rates on loans are practically usurious," explained Army Col. Rey Mapagu, who took over the Scout Ranger regiment last February 24 following the relief of their commander, Brig. Gen. Danilo Lim, who is now facing court martial proceedings for allegedly plotting a mutiny. While a soldier can borrow from the Armed Forces' Savings and Loan Association, processing takes time, Mapagu says.

On top of their respective lending facilities, the two co-ops offer other services to help their members stretch their meager salaries. NEWSBREAK visited their projects on March 14 and 16.

The Marines' co-op operates a small store beside its office inside the Enlisted Marine Recreation Hall, Marine Barracks Manila, in Taguig City. Because the buyers are also the storeowners, the cooperative charges a very small profit margin on goods sold.

For its part, the Rangers' co-op maintains a small egg production business inside the camp of the quarters of the First Scout Rangers' Regiment at Camp Tecson in San Miguel, Bulacan, where it also holds office. At the outset, the co-op invested P200,000 on a chicken coop that can accommodate around 500 egg-laying chickens.

Now working on their third batch of layers (chickens are culled at the end of every 18 weeks, when they no longer lay as many eggs), soldiers here have come to appreciate the whole venture. Eggs are sold to members at lower than market prices. Off-duty soldiers returning to their families often take the opportunity to make a decent profit in reselling them. The Rangers'

cooperative has been doing so well that in 2004, they declared P2 million in dividends. Last year, the cooperative distributed P1.2 million in dividends to its 2,000 members.

The Rangers' co-op has benefited from loans and grants from outside parties. On top of the P4 million it received last December 2005, the co-op also received P1.8 million from Saludo sa Kawal Pilipino the previous year in December 2004.

But Saludo sa Kawal Pilipino is not its sole benefactor. MSgt. Guillermo Francisco, who signed the letter of solicitation to Saludo sa Kawal, told NEWSBREAK that the co-op received donations from other sources, including a P300,000 donation from the office

of the Chief of Staff and a loan of P500,000 from the Presidential Management Staff. The Rangers' co-op decided to approach the Saludo sa Kawal Pilipino Foundation, Francisco said, because the foundation had donated jeeps to the regiment in 2000.

COLLECTION PROBLEMS

This isn't the case with the Marines' co-op, which has been suffering from financial difficulties owing to previous collection problems. "This is because they only qualified for an automatic payroll deduction account on November 2005," Marine spokesperson Maj. Melquiades Ordiales told NEWSBREAK.

To a certain extent, the experience of the

Rangers inspired the Marines to follow the same path. In October 2005, the board of directors of the Marine co-op, then in dire financial straits, decided to send out solicitation letters to senators and other politicians. They received no favorable responses.

In late December 2005, Maria Flor Querubin, the wife of Col. Querubin, learned from a friend that a co-op in the Army received money from the Saludo sa Kawal Pilipino Foundation. Knowing the problems that the Marines' co-op was facing, she asked her friend if the foundation could also help it out. "I asked her, why give only to the Army? Can they also give to the Marines?"

The friend, whom she described as a

Easy Money

Charity and politics mixed in Joseph Estrada's donations to soldiers

By ROEL LANDINGIN

WHAT DIFFERENCE a year makes.

At about this time a year ago, on April 11, 2005, then Armed Forces chief of staff Efren Abu hosted a dinner at the Tejeros Hall of the AFP Commissioned Officers' Country Club in Camp Aguinaldo. It was meant to thank donors for supporting scholarship programs for children of soldiers killed or disabled in the line of duty. The donors included former President Joseph Estrada's Saludo sa Kawal Pilipino Foundation.

Set up by Estrada in May 2000 to help families of soldiers killed or hurt after intensified military attacks against Moro Islamic Liberation Front camps in Mindanao, Saludo sa Kawal Pilipino was one of the partners of the AFP's Educational Benefits System which gives scholarships to children of soldiers. The foundation donated 713 education plans in 2000 and another 605 plans in 2002 with a total worth of about P19 million, according to its administrator, Marina Bautista.

Now, Saludo sa Kawal Pilipino is under investigation for allegedly financing a military plot against President Gloria Arroyo.

Manolo "Beaver" Lopez Jr., the foundation's president who is also Estrada's son-in-law, admitted donating P7 million late last year to the cooperatives of the Scout



LOUIS LIWANAG

THE RECIPIENT: Lawyer Roel Pulido

Rangers Regiment and Marine Corps, two units that were said to be involved in the failed plot. He also said the foundation gave at least P1 million to the lawyer of Magdalo, a group of rebellious young officers who led a mutiny in July 2003.

But Lopez insists that the money was for livelihood and welfare projects. He said the donations were aboveboard and properly documented. The two military cooperatives and Magdalo members wrote the foundation asking for donations, and Saludo sa Kawal Pilipino Foundation responded favorably. The foundation even issued its own checks to the cooperatives and a representative of Magdalo—proof says Lopez that the transactions were innocent.

So far, no charges have been filed against Lopez but that's hardly comforting for the foundation which must still live down suspicions that some of its donations are politically motivated. It's not helped any by its failure to file a report or financial statement with the Securities and Exchange Commission since it was



NEWSBREAK FILE

THE DONOR: Former President Joseph Estrada

formed in 2000.

Well-run foundations follow strict guidelines in giving grants, according to Felicidad Soledad, executive director of the Philippine Council for NGO Certification, which certifies non-government organizations for tax exemption purposes. They make sure that recipients have solid plans for spending the amount they are asking for. They also see to it that grantees have a strong institutional capacity, including financial controls, to manage the funds, she said.

The Saludo sa Kawal Pilipino had strict guidelines for its scholarship program. For example, only dependents of soldiers killed, wounded or missing in action are eligible, and the applicants must be below 23 years old. But it apparently failed to adopt similar guidelines when it gave the lump sums to the Scout Rangers and Marines cooperatives and the Magdalo soldiers.

Bautista said that the solicitation letters were simply given to Lopez who made the decisions

about whom to give and how much in consultation with other members of the board who include Jacqueline Ejercito-Lopez, Jude Ejercito, Jaime Dichaves, and lawyer Edward Serapio. The staff did not do any background papers on these requests for assistance, she said.

Roel Pulido, the lawyer for many officers and soldiers accused of taking part in the Oakwood mutiny, says he and a soldier wrote the foundation a solicitation letter in December 2005, and were pleasantly surprised when they were given P2 million a week later. It's the biggest single donation the group has received ever, topping the P1.8 million the group has raised for bail money through a fund drive and T-shirt sales in 2004.

The group originally intended to distribute the money to help 165 enlisted men who suffered salary cuts and forfeiture of pay following a plea-bargain agreement that penalized them with demotions in rank. Because the donation was unexpectedly hefty, Magdalo instead gave out P1 million to the soldiers and set aside the other P1 million as capital for a future cooperative, said Pulido.

Similarly, officers of the two cooperatives say they are just beginning to draft plans on how to spend the foundation's large donation. Like the Magdalo, the two cooperatives prepared neither a detailed project proposal nor business plan but the foundation gave them P7 million anyway.

Many may find fault with Saludo sa Kawal Pilipino's easy style of grant giving. But those who know Joseph Estrada say it just reflects the former president's way of doing things. ■

private person who is neither employed by Saludo sa Kawal Pilipino nor a relative of the Estradas, asked her for a solicitation letter from the cooperative and promised to help process the request with the foundation. The transaction, she said, was fast-tracked so that it can still form part of the foundation's financial records for fiscal year 2005.

Mrs. Querubin pointed out that she did not even know that the foundation was connected to the former president until the whole thing came out in the news. She also had no inkling that they would give that much because no amount was specified in the solicitation letter. "I did not know how much was given to the Rangers. I also did not see the check because

the Marines are the most deprived. There are co-ops within the military, for instance, who have received assistance from the Office of the President.

With the recent windfall from the Saludo sa Kawal Pilipino donation, the Marines' co-op has managed to pay its outstanding obligations. It is now embarking on plans to expand services to members. Among those in the pipeline are plans to start its own laundry service and to convert the store into a wholesale facility that will supply other stores within the Marine Barracks compound in Taguig. The Rangers are likewise planning to expand their poultry operation.

Still, some sectors find the very idea

BIGGEST MILITARY COOPERATIVES BY CAPITAL *As of end-2004*

COOPERATIVE	ADDRESS	NATURE OF BUSINESS	PAID-UP CAPITAL (P)	TOTAL MEMBERS
HEADQUARTERS PHILIPPINE NAVY MULTI PURPOSE COOP	MANILA	LENDING/TRADING	351,000	88
NAVAL AVIATION MPC	CAVITE	PROVIDE CONSUMER GOODS, FOOD AND LOAN SERVICES	326,300	105
CAGAYAN 14TH INFANTRY VETERANS MPC	MANILA	LOANS AND PROVIDE GOODS TO MEMBERS	312,500	50
JOINT SERVICES MPC	QUEZON CITY	LENDING/RELENDING	312,500	15
PIONEER ENLISTED PERSONNEL CREDIT COOP	ANGELES CITY	LENDING	260,000	26
AGUINALDO VETS & ASSOCIATES CREDIT COOP	QUEZON CITY	SAVINGS AND LOAN	254,000	38
520TH AIR BASE WING MPC	PASAY	LENDING, BOWLING HALL OPERATION & MGT., CANTEEN, BARBER SHOP	223,900	920
205TH TACTICAL OPERATIONS WING CREDIT COOP	PASAY	LENDING	193,700	1030
PROVIDER TRANSPORT SERVICE COOP	QUEZON CITY	TRANSPORTATION	189,000	189
4ID DIAMOND MPC	CAG. DE ORO	CONSUMERS	160,525	800
REGION III AFP RETIREES MPC	ANGELES CITY	MARKETING AND RE-LENDING	158,000	63
NAVAL LOGISTIC CENTER MPC	CAVITE	CREDIT; TRADING	152,400	103
PEERLESS (802ND INFANTRY BRIGADE) COOP	EASTERN SAMAR	PRODUCTION & TRADING	150,000	47
MILITARY ACTIVE RESERVE CIVILIAN POLICE COOP	QUEZON CITY	POULTRY & CATTLE LENDING, CONSUMER	150,000	15
KSKP MPC	QUEZON CITY	LENDING, PROVIDE JANITORIAL SERVICES, MARKETING OF OFFICE SUPP	150,000	15
AGUINALDO CHAPTER 64TH INFANTRY (KNIGHTS) BATTALION MP COOP	DAVAO	CONS/CRED/MKTG	146,700	489
NAVAL INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY FORCE MPC	MAKATI	LENDING, SALE OF CONSUMER STORE	142,000	71
SPEARHEAD MPC	CAPIZ	CROP PRODUCTION & LENDING	138,500	277
SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND (SOCOM) MPC	NUEVA ECUIA	TRADING AND LENDING	125,000	257
102ND BRIGADE/LADIES MPC	Z. SIBUGAY	CONSUMER, CREDIT	124,000	62

Source: Cooperative Development Authority

it was delivered in an envelope."

Though not a member of the Marines' cooperative, Mrs. Querubin told NEWSBREAK that it is normal for her to look out for its welfare as president of the Marine Ladies Club. Part of the club's activities, she says, is finding out ways to help alleviate the plight of ordinary soldiers. "We have been raising money to provide assistance to enlisted personnel who are sending their children to college."

Neither is it unusual for her husband to help raise funds for the men, she said. Since Querubin has been awarded the Medal of Valor, she explained, he has been using the goodwill he earned to help his men. Of all the branches of the service, she explained,

of enlisted men turning to politicians for assistance and being granted by them millions of pesos in cash as disturbing. Retired general and *Inquirer* columnist Ramon Farolan, for instance, points out the need to ensure that the arms soldiers bear "are not for sale to anyone or any group."

The problem, according to Defense Secretary Avelino Cruz Jr., is that policies and instructions concerning cooperatives in the military are scattered. "We will draw up a policy on military cooperatives," he told NEWSBREAK. "Co-ops should benefit everybody rather than a few, and they should not prejudice the principle of insulating the military from partisan politics." ■

THERE ARE 300, SO FAR

SOLDIERS DO not have freedom of speech, but they seem to enjoy every bit of entrepreneurial liberty at the rate armed forces units are forming cooperatives—tax-free entities formed by members to promote their socio-economic welfare.

According to the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA), there are close to 300 military and police cooperatives with a total membership of 23,000 as of end-2004. Close to two-thirds of the cooperatives were formed between 1991 and 1997, when co-op formation reached a peak. The CDA suspects there are many more unregistered military co-ops.

Many military and police co-ops are small. The average number of members is 80, while mean paid-up capitalization is only P48, 455. But a few have over a thousand members and their capital could run up to hundreds of thousands of pesos.

The 52nd Engineering Brigade Multi-Purpose Cooperative, which lends money and sells appliance to its 5,860 members, has the most number of members. In terms of capital, the leading military co-op is the Philippine Navy Headquarters Multi-Purpose Cooperative, which is capitalized at P351,000, and gives consumer credit to its 88 members.

An overwhelming number of military and police cooperatives exist to lend money to members and help them buy basic consumer goods and appliances on credit. Money, or the lack of it, is the primary driver in the formation of cooperatives in the uniformed services.

Co-ops represent another source of cheap credit for soldiers, in addition to the numerous military savings and loans associations. Some money-lending coops such as the AFP Finance Center Multi-Purpose Cooperative, which has lent over P126 million to members as of end-2004, match the scale of operation of a major service's savings and loan association, which is more tightly regulated by the central bank.

Only a few military co-ops make a product or deliver a service needed by the community. The Naval Force Central Multi-Purpose Cooperative in Cebu City is engaged in Lapu-lapu fish production while the Gozar Air Station Multi-Purpose Cooperative in Lubang, Occidental Mindoro, raises cattle and other livestock. The Tabak Division cooperative in Labangan, Zamboanga del Sur, is engaged in tree planting.

—Roel Lamingin

By MIRIAM GRACE A. GO

IN AN ungodly hour in January 2005, the lawyer in Fernando Poe Jr.'s election protest case against President Arroyo got a call from opposition leaders Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay and Horacio "Boy" Morales.

The two told counsel Sixto Brillantes Jr. that they had "very reliable information" about an administration operation to break into the secure area at the House of Representatives, where the election returns (ERs) and certificates of canvass (COCs) were being kept in ballot boxes since Congress finished canvassing the votes for President and Vice President in June 2004.

The information was that a group hired by the administration had printed and filled out fresh ERs to be switched with the genuine ERs in the Batasan.

Poe's camp has maintained that President Arroyo's operators tampered with the COCs in Mindanao during the canvassing in 2004. If the protest proceedings lead to the review of the ERs (based on results from the precincts) in the concerned provinces, these documents would show that the votes from the precincts don't add up to the votes reflected in the COCs. Thus, there would be a need for the Arroyo camp to replace the incriminating ERs with the "corrected" ones.

Binay and Morales asked Brillantes: did he, by any chance, know the alleged head of the operation, a certain Roque Bello?

"When they said Roque Bello, *kinabahan na ako* (I grew nervous)," Brillantes recalled.

BETTER THAN GARCIA?

He had reason to feel that way. News of Bello's involvement in election campaigns or protest cases has always provoked alarm among rival campaign strategists and election lawyers since the Marcos years. In NEWSBREAK's interviews with political players in the past, Bello had been identified as an "operator" of better caliber than former elections commissioner Virgilio Garcillano. (Read Bello's profile in "Master Operator," www.newsbreak.com.ph.)

Garcillano, whom Bello acknowledges is his "very good friend," had been charged in court for electoral fraud before he was appointed by Arroyo to the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) and allegedly headed the *dagdag-bawas* operations for her in 2004.

While Garcillano's supposed trademark is padding and shaving the figures in the end-documents that are the COCs officially used in the field, Bello's supposed style is more sophisticated, "cleaner" or more difficult to detect. He can reportedly acquire or

produce the more basic election forms, such as the ballots and election returns, fill them with necessary figures that would make his clients win, either in the elections or in protests. Those in the know seem to suggest that while Garcillano chases the forms in the field, Bello gets hold of them before they are distributed in the field.

He gets the extra sheets of security papers used by the COMELEC for these forms using his contacts within the commission, where he served for 23 years before his forced retirement in 1986, these sources

amiable. He is a lot different from his younger days at the COMELEC when, employees recall, he was strict and often prone to outbursts. Like his friend Garcillano, his face didn't reflect the notoriety of the "master operator" that he is known to be in political circles.

He has nothing to hide and wants to clear his name, he said. Then he let out a sigh, dropped his shoulders, and shook his head after he saw again the photographs purportedly showing how elections returns used to cheat for President Arroyo were manufactured and accomplished on the

UNRAVELING BELLO

The lawyer who allegedly cheated for President Arroyo speaks up—and leaves many questions unanswered



say. He accomplishes the forms like they were accomplished by the official election inspectors and officers, by tapping his network of forgers called golden arms and *pianistas*. And he can sneak the fabricated or pre-accomplished forms into the ballot boxes, these sources explain, by his having skilled pick locks. (To get a better idea of these operators' work, see "Cheats Inc.," www.newsbreak.com.ph.)

When NEWSBREAK met up with him at a fastfood restaurant in Tarlac on March 16, Bello at 66 looked gentle and sounded

veranda of his house at 1547 Birmingham Street, Brookside Hills, Cainta, Rizal.

At times, when the questions turned sensitive, he would turn a bit fidgety, rubbing his right thumb against his left fist.

"I don't know why they call me an operator when all the evidence I present [in election cases] are all on the level. Whenever I appear before the COMELEC or before the courts, I always present documentary evidence—either the minutes of the voting, statement of votes, election returns. I don't consider myself an operator. I consider

myself a lawyer who sometimes wins his cases, sometimes loses them.”

Bello is a relative and former law firm partner of Brillantes. When NEWSBREAK asked him why Bello left their firm in 1996, Brillantes said that when the seven other partners in the firm felt that Bello could manage to go solo, they decided to let go of him.

Brillantes conceded that Bello was “a big help” when he came in, which was right after the latter left the poll body in 1986. In all the protest cases that the law firm handled after the 1987 elections—the first

He felt that private law practice was more lucrative, so he left the government service.

However, Bello acknowledges that in 2001, when Ms. Arroyo became president, he manifested his interest to return to the COMELEC, as an appointed commissioner. He even met with then presidential political affairs adviser Joey Rufino to get the latter’s endorsement. Rufino would later be tagged as one of those who endorsed Garcillano to the President and who picked the operators who would carry out many of the dirty tricks for her in the 2004 elections.

COMMISSIONER-IN-WAITING

Bello’s name is being floated again to fill any of the three vacant commissioners’ seats. He suspects this is one reason that his critics are linking him to the reported wholesale manufacturing of election returns for President Arroyo.

“My friends tell me, ‘Your name is being dragged because of your relationship with Garci,’” Bello said. “That is the only reason I see, because after Garci went into hiding... he called me. He said, ‘I think I cannot go back [to the COMELEC] anymore. I will talk



LUIS LIWANANG

election under the new Constitution—“he readily spotted all the forms of cheating” committed by parties in the cases.

Bello is one of the former regional directors who are referred to in the COMELEC as the “casualties of the revolution,” those who were removed from the poll body after the EDSA 1 revolt for their reputation as implementers of election fraud during the Marcos regime. Bello had to leave together with Garcillano and other COMELEC directors.

Bello explains his early retirement differently.

TWO SIDES TO A STORY

Raising questions on Roque Bello’s explanation of the photos

HE SAYS

He told ANC on March 15 that the house in the photo was possibly his. Later, he said he could no longer ascertain this because the pictures were blurred.

It’s part of his work to be examining copies of election returns (ERs), as provided by the party of his clients, so they could compare these with the ERs that the rival would present in the hearings.

The cutting and pasting of a blank slip of paper on the space for serial numbers was a way of getting the measurements as they appeared in genuine ERs, so his revisors could check possible fake ERs against this.

He usually spends Christmas in his home province in Ilocos Sur, so why would his house in Cainta, Rizal, be abuzz with activities? The photos were said to have been taken Dec. 23 to 26, 2004.

Bello told NEWSBREAK that he “usually” spends Christmas in Ilocos Sur, but can’t recall where he was in the Christmas of 2004.

If you’re manufacturing and accomplishing ERs for operations, it’s impossible to accomplish 6,000 even in a month’s time. It can be done only if you’ll hire 40 persons to accomplish five ERs each for 30 days.

It’s useless to replace only one copy of an ER because there will be genuine copies with other parties against which the figures in the fabricated ERs can be compared.

THEY SAY

GMA-7’s video of their visit to Bello’s house shows exactly the same veranda.

Why did he have ERs from Sulu and Sultan Kudarat when he didn’t have clients there at the time? Virgilio Garcillano’s alleged *dagdag-bawas* operations were reported to have been carried out in these provinces.

Election lawyer Leila de Lima says there are other ways of determining the authenticity of ERs (such as checking the figures and the signatures) without resorting to cutting and pasting. “That is too advanced and sophisticated. If this is the lawyer’s way of determining the authenticity of ERs, it only shows *na ‘yun ang linya mo.*”

Seasoned operators and election lawyers say they are “doubly alert” during the Christmas week because that’s when most people are relaxed and on vacation, and also when they or their rivals in protest can “perform miracles.”

Experienced operators say it can be done. Skilled “golden arms” can sign five signatures in two minutes. The tally marks, numbers, signatures, and thumbmarks in the ERs for the Batasan operation were reportedly accomplished in three months, but with the space for the serial numbers left blank. The accomplished ERs were just fed to a numbering machine when one became available.

It hasn’t happened yet in the Philippines that the municipal courts, the COMELEC, the House, senatorial, and presidential electoral tribunals have sustained the lone copy of the ER that differed from the rest of the set.

to the people who endorsed me, so they will also endorse you.”

Yet, while he refused to categorically admit that the photos of the alleged fabrication of ERs that we published were indeed taken in his house (see “*Taking It*” on www.newsbreak.com.ph), Bello has his own suspects as to who is linking him to election fraud: certain political camps that he was unable to help in 2004.

“There were many who came to me, asking me to include the names of their

clients (national candidates) in the lineups that my clients (local candidates) would be supporting. Before the canvassing, they were still talking to me. But I told them that I cannot dictate on my clients...so that’s why they were angry.” This is his problem: “*Ni hindi ko kilala kung sino ang kalaban ko* (I don’t know who my enemies are.)”

Bello points out that one of those operators or campaign handlers who visited his home office could have taken the photographs.

He refuses to name his suspects, but says the person was able to take those pictures freely precisely because “my workers know that we were not doing anything illegal, we were not hiding anything there.”

A long-time campaign strategist, who had no part in the Batasan operation but knew of Bello’s reputation as an operator, pointed out that political handlers and operators wouldn’t approach Bello for such a “special request” if they didn’t know that he had been doing it.

“There Was No Operation of This Kind”

The following are excerpts from the interview of Miriam Grace A. Go with Roque Bello on March 16:

This is what the camp of Loren Legarda is saying now, that they found ERs in the ballot boxes in the Batasan that didn’t match the COMELEC and NAMFREL copies. The figures from Lanao del Sur are different.

There are numerous other cases where that happens. One copy is not the same, because that copy is falsified. But you can disregard that: Go to the other copies to prove what the real results were.

So you’re saying it’s useless to falsify just the Batasan copy.

Useless if you falsify only one. I mean, useless if that ER is proven to be fake.... One who does not know his election laws will probably resort to that.

The pictures show at least two vehicles. Are these yours?

Yes.

We got a report that the President was choosing between you and Garcillano in 2004.

I did not apply in 2004. I will say that I applied in 2001. But presently, I’m not interested anymore. With things that the commission is worried [about], I won’t dare to even go there and answer for the COMELEC.... I’m very much disgusted with the present condition of the COMELEC.

You reportedly got paid P56 million. They say you’re rich now.

That’s too big. The last time I bought a car was 2002, the other in 1998 or 1999. My life became comfortable only when my children all finished college.

Your FX was reportedly used to transport the ERs.

My FX, we used that to transport voluminous documents, including election returns, for my clients in the cases I handle, but not to bring ERs to the Batasan.

The story is too detailed and complicated for some people to be just making it up.

Wala akong alam na ibang dahilan.

Did you talk to Garci after we identified you in our September 12 issue?

Yes. He called me, *kinumusta. Sabi nya, “O ano na nangyayari sa iyo dyan? Nakakalabas ka pa ba? Nahihirapan ka bang umikot?”* Sabi ko hindi naman, I can move around freely.

Will this affect your chances of being appointed to the COMELEC?

Probably. Even if I’m appointed, I probably won’t be confirmed by the Commission on Appointments.

If and when you are called to any investigation, will you appear? What will you say?

Yes, I will speak. And I will tell the truth, that there was no operation of this kind. ■

LA LOMA BOYS

Indeed, sources say, Bello is considered the “mentor” of seasoned operators. His original group was called the La Loma Boys, referring to the place in Quezon where the core members came from. Some of them have since formed their own groups that offer to politicians and campaign strategists the package of special services that include fabricating ballots, forging signatures and thumbmarks, and picking the locks of ballot boxes.

NEWSBREAK has documents showing that many of them who were trained by or have been regularly dealing with Bello were the subject of previous confidential probes of the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI). They were mostly investigated for printing fake ballots, but the NBI has not released any final reports so far.

There is no mistaking their familiarity with Bello. In conversations with NEWSBREAK, election handlers who have dealt with him call him “Manong Roque.” We have also heard the operators—the forgers, the *pianistas*, and the *kandado* boys—refer to him as “RBB,” his initials.

Last year, when we were preparing our September 12 report, he refused to take our calls. But since we published in March the photos that a source said would support our earlier report on the Batasan operation, he has granted interviews to three journalists, so far.

If indeed Bello had this deal with the President’s camp, observers can’t help compare his situation with Garcillano’s. After wiretapped conversations between President Arroyo and Garcillano came out middle of last year, Garcillano went into hiding, amid clear signs of the government’s hand in the coverup. He surfaced this year, not admitting anything and telling a spotty story of where he had been.

After our interview with Bello, we sent him a question through text: assuming that he indeed operated for President Arroyo, is his sudden accessibility to the media a means of taking the heat off the President? The principal was being shielded, while the operator was being put on the spot. Bello replied: “I don’t know the answer.” ■

They're young,
they choose service
over money, and
they like it in the
bureaucracy—
despite its problems

GEMS IN GOVERNMENT

ROMMEL ROMATO

Work in the Ombudsman makes him 'happy and satisfied'

By EVELYN KATIGBAK

ROMMEL ROMATO recalls reading a newspaper report about then Ombudsman Simeon Marcelo wanting to recruit young people to join in the fight against graft and corruption.

"The idea really appealed to me," says



Born: March 2, 1981
Education: BA Philosophy, University of the Philippines; finishing an MA in Urban and Regional Planning
Lesson learned: Integrity is indispensable in public service

division to inquire if the news report on Marcelo was true, and was told it was.

Romato, who was then on his first year of graduate studies in urban and regional planning at the University of the Philippines (UP).

To work with the office tasked to protect the people against public officials' misuse and abuse of authority excited him. He called the Office of the Ombudsman's human resource

Romato applied and was taken in together with several other young people.

Now 24, he has no regrets taking on the job. Since his appointment on Oct. 22, 2004, he has always been proud to be part of the Office of the Ombudsman. He describes the agency as a "true instrument of change and social justice."

As an associate graft investigating officer, Romato has been doing legal research for almost one and a half years now. Had he not joined the Office of the Ombudsman, he believes he would still be doing a job related to public service.

After graduating with a philosophy degree from UP in 2002, he considered working with a nongovernment organization (NGO). Another option for him was to teach

philosophy or sociology at Mindanao State University (MSU). He graduated with special awards from the MSU Science High School in 1998 and had fond memories of his school days there.

He eventually settled on the job opening at the Office Ombudsman, convinced that it was similar to what he used to do as a campus leader in UP—studying and articulating issues affecting Philippine society.

Romato was president of the UP Muslim Students' Association in 2000. The following year, he became a councilor of the University Student Council (USC) and was later elected USC chairperson, serving from 2002 to 2003.

"What I do now is not far from what I did in college because the office [of the Ombudsman] is also idealistic. It is the watchdog of government over abuses of public officials. So I see my work as both pro-active and progressive."

He is reluctant to call his work public service, explaining that "it seems so heroic-sounding." He would rather just say that his work with the Office of the Ombudsman makes him "happy and satisfied." He also sees the need for idealistic people in the government, and so "this is a response to that need."

His idealism has not waned, although he concedes there's quite a difference between advocating change when one is a student and advocating change when one has gone into "the real world."

In what ways has he been working for change where he is now? He replies: "I help in the programs of the Office of the Ombudsman for institution building." He takes part in training activities that enhance the work of the agency and make it more effective, efficient, and responsive.

He also admits that the job is "not financially rewarding." But he hastens to add, "It is just right for me as a beginner." He grosses P13,000 to P15,000 a month, including benefits.

In his short stay with government, he is already learning some valuable lessons.

First, employees should not stop learning, so they will know what problems to deal with and eventually find appropriate solutions.

Second, those who are in government should be vigilant.

Third, they have to be committed.

Finally, Romato says his experience in the Office of the Ombudsman taught him that integrity is indispensable in public service.

All these he keeps in mind as he goes about his work, doing his share to help make the Office of the Ombudsman a symbol of credibility and integrity. ■

MARIAN KANNA MOTOOMULL

Senate work fits her advocacy

By EVELYN KATIGBAK

MARIAN KANNA Motoomull, a graduate of the Ateneo Law School, entered government full of idealism.

A classmate in law school—a member of the legislative staff of Sen. Maria Ana Consuelo "Jamby" Madrigal—had asked her if she would be interested in working for the senator, specifically with the youth, women, and family relations committee, which Madrigal chairs.

The offer caught Motoomull's interest, for she had always seen herself as a lawyer promoting women and children's rights.

She joined Madrigal's staff in September 2004. She enjoys the job except that the "work system" in government can be "very slow and tedious."

Motoomull, 27, also notes how some people in government could be very uncooperative—for instance, delaying or withholding the release of some documents she needed for a project or a study on women's issues.

What did she learn after one and a half years of government work? "Politics is inevitable. What one does is always influenced or affected by politics." Consequently,

compromises become all too common.

But she is not giving up her hope for change and her goal of making a difference. "Idealism is not dead!" She is not one to be easily discouraged. One strategy she has developed to make the job easier: Look for like-minded people and work with them.

Her tasks on the legislative staff range from preparing briefs for the senator to organizing consultations with constituents. She works beyond regular office hours.

How does she find the compensation for her kind of work?

"Well, this is public service," she says with a laugh. "The remuneration is not good, but you get to do work that fits your advocacy." For her, it is pursuing a legislative agenda that relates to women and children's rights.

Asked how much she is getting, she would not give a figure. Instead, she says, "A call-center salary is bigger." But the low salary does not bother her, for she had planned to work for government anyway, even during her college days.

She holds a bachelor's degree in public administration from the University of the Philippines. After graduating in 2001, she briefly worked as a student assistant for Jose Abueva, president of Kalayaan College. She left the job when she decided to take up law.

She took the bar in September 2005. While waiting for the exam results, she concentrates on her work in the Senate, content with the thought that "I'm doing a meaningful job." ■



Born: March 12, 1979

Education: BA Public Administration, University of the Philippines; Ateneo Law School

Lesson learned: Politics is inevitable





EDEN LUMILAN

'I'm part of the solution'

By JET DAMAZO

IF YOU didn't know any better, you'd probably mistake her for a college student at the university beside her office. It's not an unlikely mistake; 26-year old Edén Grace Lumilan is hardly your typical government employee.

Petite, with long hair and a sweet face matched by girlish glee, Edén is not the image that comes to mind when you think of a National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) senior economic development specialist helping to make sure the country meets the United Nations'

daunting Millennium Development Goals.

But Edén was never much about fitting stereotypes. Cocooned in a college where activism is fostered and students become fascinated with Marxian philosophies, she chose instead to serve the country by joining the government. When she began working for NEDA a few months after graduating, she would wait until the clock struck 12 noon before taking off for lunch, when the office norm was to take the midday meal at 11:30 a.m. And when most yuppies would jump at more lucrative job offers, she has turned down companies that offered her thrice the figure written on her paycheck.

"I'm not a hypocrite to say that I didn't consider the money. Everybody needs money," she says. "But at the end of the day, you have to have a sense of fulfillment in what you're doing."

Fulfillment, perhaps, encapsulates the



Born: Jan. 20, 1980

Education: Development Studies, University of the Philippines; Masters in Public Policy, UP

Lesson learned: Planners have to think in the long term

reasons she became, and remains, a public servant. It may sound trite, but it's not any less true.

"I asked one of my friends who has been with the government for 12 years why she was still here. It appeared that we had the same line of thought. Isn't it corny already? That line has been used so much.

But I guess those are the things we don't really talk about but understand among ourselves."

This is not to say that life as a public servant has been ideal. As she says, working at the national level where you are hardly directly in touch with the people, you can sometimes feel discouraged because you seldom see the fruits of what you are doing.

Politics, of course, is a major source of frustration. "Secretaries have different directions; one may be in favor of population, another doesn't want to talk about population. You have to be conscious about those," she explains. "Your line of thinking has to be the same as your boss's. That's the sad part."

"It's frustrating sometimes because they tend to be reactive, like with sws surveys. But planners cannot be reactive; we have to think in the long term," she adds. "Sometimes they make pronouncements at the top, which the line agencies just have to adjust to."

Because of these, she says, the agency she decided to join as an idealistic college student is now no longer perceived to be as good as it once was.

From an employee's point of view, the government is also far from being a model employer. While the starting pay at NEDA is relatively competitive at P12,000, the remuneration for division chiefs is a low P20,000. Career growth is also limited. "Right now I'm at the senior level. You're career is dead when you're at the senior level. You can't go higher anymore."

Yet, she stays. Self-fulfillment and the desire to make a difference sustains her, she says. When she goes out of her office to monitor projects and sees how these are able to help people, she is encouraged to stay.

Besides, it's not all that bad. Public service does have its perks, like scholarships and travel. Working in NEDA, she says, has allowed her to obtain a postgraduate degree in public policy at the University of the



Philippines. "It's a comfort zone. I've been doing this for so long so I can manage my studies and at the same time use it to my advantage. All my policy studies are usually what I'm handling at work."

She pours her frustrations out on her college papers. "At work, you try to make do with whatever is available. In class, I criticize. For instance, the statistics are good, but do they really say what's happening?"

"I think it's healthy. I think it's abnormal if you don't question your institution," she adds. But, she qualifies: if you criticize, it has to be constructive.

"One of my realizations before, when we usually wrote critical papers and attended rallies at Mendiola, [was that] these people are in the streets fighting for something. You have the right to do that, but if you're not offering any alternative, you're being unfair to the people you're criticizing and to the people you say you're fighting for. You're not part of the solution; you're just causing traffic."

So she stays, because in NEDA, she is part of the solution. "There is still hope for us. If we all give up, all the more that we will all go down."

JOHN P. SEVILLA

Not Just a Cog in the Bureaucracy

By MICHAEL CRUZ

What prompts a young man to leave behind a job that allows him to hobnob with some of the world's most influential financiers, live in cosmopolitan cities, vacation to exotic places, pay an obscene amount of money, all while allowing him to perfect his craft in investment banking?

It may sound corny, but for John P. Sevilla the reason is simple: love of country.

"I have lived all over the world, but this is the only country I care for," he said, talking from behind his desk at the Department of Finance, piled high with papers.

A consultant for the asset privatization program, the 37-year old Sonny—as he is known to friends—is now one of the most important people in the effort to sell non-performing assets that drain the cash-strapped Philippine government of billions of pesos each year.

But Sevilla's story is not one of a typical state bureaucrat accustomed to punching time cards in and out everyday.

Before joining the finance department last year, he worked as an investment banker for white-shoe firm Goldman Sachs,

based in Hong Kong. He worked with many other investment banking firms in the 20 years he's spent abroad since graduating from high school in the exclusive Xavier School in Greenhills, San Juan. After that, he studied political science, economics, and public administration from US Ivy League pillars Cornell and Princeton.

"I studied these courses because I was interested in them," he said, adding, "Government and public policy are my first loves."

True enough, the idealistic Sevilla immediately came to work for the Department of Agrarian Reform during the Aquino administration, but was bitten by the travel bug soon after.

"The world is so big," he said. "It's such a good experience to travel, so I traveled."

Fast forward to 2005. The government's privatization program was left in the lurch after former Finance Secretary Cesar V. Purisima quit the Arroyo administration along with the now famous "Hyatt 10".

"I was told by a friend of a friend that [Finance Undersecretary] Jay Singson was looking for a consultant for privatization," Sevilla said.

He was not about to switch to his "save-the-world" mode in an instant, though. "I decided I would not work for government unless I could have a significant impact—I didn't want to be just

a cog in the bureaucracy—and unless I had achieved a certain degree of financial independence," Sevilla said.

Having met both conditions, he decided to go to work for one of the finance department's most controversial programs. "Everything is difficult here," he said, but with no hint of exasperation common to his predecessors. "There are many problems."

Unlike the private sector where the goal of making money moves the entire organization to action, public sector work is more complicated, he explained. "Transparency is important here," he said. "And there are lots of approvals needed at all levels."

So far, the government's privatization team has yet to produce a major success. Its efforts to sell the former International School campus in Makati City recently flopped amid rumors of intervention by

influential people with strong ties to Malacañang. Asked about it, Sevilla suddenly clenches his jaws, mockingly darts his eyes from side to side, and makes a comical "zip-the-lip" motion.

Despite this, he said he continues to feel strongly about his role in the government, and he has no doubt that he will eventually make a broader impact on the country.

"I know what I was getting into, he said. "So far, there are no surprises." ■



Born: Jan. 31, 1969
Education: BA Government and Economics, Cornell University; Master's in Public Affairs, Princeton
Lesson learned: Transparency is important



A LONG STAY

The US Special Operations Task Force in Mindanao has never left since 2001



The JOSTF is composed of US Marines, Air Force, Navy, Army, and Special Forces, all under the US Pacific Command. They change personnel every six months and have apparently no intention to set up a permanent base in Mindanao. The QDR stressed that the US military was shifting from static defense forces to “mobile, expeditionary operations.”

Bayanihan

Project Bayanihan, a long-term US security assistance program to the AFP, is ongoing and aims “to continue enhancing the ability of the AFP in counter-terrorism operations.”

Five modules are in place: the Light Reaction Company training to build units capable of precise military operations, the Light Infantry Battalion training improving individual skills of soldiers and staff command and control functions, Huey helicopter maintenance and night vision goggle flight training, the operations and intelligence training focusing on the staff skills of Philippine Regional Commands, and the formal schools, programs of instructions to enhance skills in intelligence, civil affairs, medical, and information operations.

Maj. Randy Cephus, former JOSTF public affairs officer, explained that the continuation of Project Bayanihan does not require separate Terms of Reference, “because it was already authorized through the RP-US Mutual Defense Board which was signed in August 2002,” giving assurances then that all the activities would end in December 2003.

The JOSTF has widened its scope to as far as General Santos City, Davao City, the entire Zamboanga Peninsula (covering Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga del Norte, Pagadian City, and Zamboanga City), Cotabato, Sulu, Basilan, and Tawi-tawi.

Warina Jukuy, chair of the Asian Muslim Action Network in the Philippines, says the Americans arrived in Mindanao with limited information on what provinces they would be operating in. Some areas would see night-flying aircraft without the residents knowing that Americans were already in their area.

By **JULIE S. ALIPALA** in Zamboanga, Sulu

THE JOINT RP-US Balikatan 2006 has officially ended here in this province, but the operating personnel of the Joint Special Operations Task Force Philippines (JSOTFP) will remain indefinitely.

“We have no intention to stay. What we are concerned most [about] is the planting of the seed for development,” Col. James Linder, the over-all commander of JSOTFP, told reporters in early March.

But Linder was simply informing residents that the major forces involved in the humanitarian program were leaving. What he didn’t say was the fact that the primary American contingent under JSOTFP was going to stay longer—mainly for civil-military operations projects to win hearts and minds away from terrorist groups.

Lt. Col. Rudy de Belen, commander of the Marine Battalion Landing Team 4, confirmed to **NEWSBREAK** that a dozen or more American personnel are staying in the province “until they are able to accomplish fully the mission, including the Bayanihan program.” Bayanihan activities include medical missions, construction of roads, bridges and water wells, and renovation

of a hospital. They began here in October last year, two months after the team of Col. Greg Wilson (former JSOTFP commander) accomplished their assessment mission in the province.

When Balikatan started in Sulu, the same projects were implemented although with a bigger contingent of Americans. Under Bayanihan, only limited US personnel are around and their work is subcontracted to Filipinos. They simply do the monitoring and evaluation.

It appears that the US military has no plans of leaving the conflict areas in Mindanao, particularly where they have already held some joint exercises with their Filipino counterparts. At present, the American presence can be seen in Zamboanga, Cotabato, General Santos, Davao, Pagadian, and Sulu.

The JOSTF reflects the new US strategy in fighting terrorism in various parts of the world. In the US Department of Defense’s Quadrennial Defense Review Report (QDR) released in February 2006, a key decision made was to “strengthen forces to defeat terrorist networks.” This translates into increasing Special Operations Forces and deploying them in “joint and combined operations,” a shift from the “separate military service concepts of operation.”

"You wake up one day and they're already here," Jukuy adds.

The vice mayor of Sirawai in Zamboanga del Norte, Nolidia Inding, admitted that she was surprised to learn about the conduct of Balance Piston in her town, "but since they promised to provide humanitarian assistance to our people, why complain?"

Lt. Col. Mark Zimmer, public affairs officer of the JSOTFP, explained that there's nothing wrong with keeping their movements confidential. "It is a force protection issue, the security of our personnel is vital," Zimmer said. This means they use only their own troops as "close-in" security, although the AFP provided an estimated four battalions as the overall force protection for the Americans.

Enduring Freedom

Prior to their first arrival in Zamboanga City and Basilan province in 2001, former Balikatan 02-1 training directorate chief

In January 2002, about 260 US troops arrived in Basilan and Zamboanga City to form the larger task force known as Joint Task Force 510 with direct supervision from Brig. Gen. Donald Wurster. They put up several concrete structures in Zamboanga City and Basilan and hauled in their land, sea, and air assets and other surveillance equipment.

Success in Basilan

After Enduring Freedom, a new unit was formed, the Joint Task Force 510 (JTF510) with Wurster as the commanding officer. Their initial "touching ground" in Zamboanga City was not that easy although the majority of the residents supported their stay.

They encountered several setbacks such as the MH47 Chinook helicopter crash on Feb. 22, 2002 in Dumaguete City, the accidental shooting of a US serviceman in Basilan last May 26, 2002, and the death of

medical supplies, invested \$6 million in 28 construction projects, and donated \$60,000 worth of medical supplies, \$236,000 worth of medicines, and \$1 million for follow-up humanitarian assistance projects.

As JTF510 personnel were starting to pack up, another unit took over, but still under the US Pacific Command.

By August 2003, the JTF510 was transformed into what is now the JSOTFP with a mission to carry out a long-term security assistance program with the AFP. JSOTFP resumed the unfinished projects with total funding of \$78.65 million for 2003.

Maj. Richard Sater, former public affairs officer of JTF510, said there was supplemental funding for 2003 to 2004 of \$20 million for Foreign Military Funds (a congressionally appropriated grant given to foreign governments to finance the purchase of American made weapons, services, and training).

The JSOTFP also allotted, for 2004, \$10 million from the Presidential Drawdown Authority for tents, blankets, radios, uniforms, food or medicine, \$2.4 million for International Military Education Training, another \$2.7 million and \$21.5 million for acquisition value, "funding support and initial spares for existing programs."

In 2005, they appropriated \$750,000 for Bayanihan in Sulu.

Chameleons

Amirah Lidasan, executive secretary of Moro Human Rights Center, has likened the Americans' strategy to a "chameleon" because they keep changing their names and the people running their operation. "They even built permanent structures in places where they conducted Balikatan exercises," Lidasan explained.

"They declare the total number of troops, but what we fear most are those hidden in some areas in Mindanao. The declared troops are conducting medical missions while the undeclared ones are doing the surveillance," she added.

The US Pacific Command assigned a new commander, Col. Alan Walker, to JSOTFP on June 23, 2003. On September 17 of the same year, another commander came in, Lt. Col. Anthony Abati of Camp Smith in Hawaii, followed by Col. Greg Wilson, then Lt. Col. Eric Haider, and now Linder.

Until now, after the successful humanitarian mission in Sulu, Linder vows to duplicate their projects in different areas not only in Mindanao but throughout the Philippines, "because we are here as per invitation of the Philippine government. If the government no longer needs our support, we can always leave." ■



If the [Philippine] government no longer needs our support, we can always leave.
— COL. JAMES LINDER

TERENCE KOH

Maj. Gen. Emmanuel Teodosio defended the faceless, nameless members of the assessment team." [Their anonymity] is a request from their government, we just have to respect them. The US military had made it a policy that no identities, no complete names will be given for obvious reasons, primarily for security."

Fresh from Afghanistan, the Americans decided to duplicate their all-out war on terror in Mindanao. It was a campaign called Operation Enduring Freedom. They did several consultations and, with the agreement of the Armed Forces, the campaign has widened in scope and objective.

In late 2001, the Americans started in Zamboanga City with their assessment in the nearby province of Basilan. "We are here to determine the immediate needs of the Philippine Armed Forces," said the public affairs officer of the US Special Operations Command-Pacific then, Maj. Cynthia Teramae.

an officer in an explosion on Oct. 2, 2002. Several road accidents were also reported in Tuburan, Basilan as well as in Zamboanga City.

Despite the death and injuries of the American personnel, their interest to pursue the anti-terror war in Southern Philippines didn't falter.

Training along with humanitarian assistance took place in Basilan until July 2003. Military units in Basilan benefited from the war games down to company level, while residents enjoyed the short-lived humanitarian assistance such as water wells, roads, and an airstrip.

Massive engineering works in Basilan included the paving of 79.2 kilometers of circumferential road, and the building of four new bridges, four new wells, four new helicopter landing zones, two boat landings, one pier, and the Basilan runway.

JTF510 also brought in 57,000 pounds of donated gifts and 90,000 pounds of

WEAR YOUR SNEAKERS IN MAY

It will take a shopper two and a half days to check out the entire Mall of Asia



By CARMELA FONBUENA

YOU THINK you've seen it all. On weekends, you can negotiate Glorietta, Megamall, or Greenbelt with eyes closed. You can picture every corner in your mind—on which floor your favorite shoe shop is, where you can buy those inexpensive cheongsams, at which corner the gadgets store is. Why, you can even visit two giant malls in a day without a sweat.

The truth is, you haven't seen all. You haven't seen the Mall of Asia.

In February, we did an ocular visit of Henry Sy's latest business venture and it took us two hours of brisk walking to see the entire mall. And to think that the shops were empty at the time! The Mall of Asia has a floor area of about 400,000 square meters, which hosts an Olympic-size skating rink, the country's first IMAX theater, and a fleet of restaurants, among others.

There's been a lot of buzz about the mall by the Manila bay. After all, its opening has been delayed many times. Now, the mall will finally open on May 19, at the height of the summer break.

Sy seems to have exercised a lot of business prudence in his latest venture. The 1997 financial crisis scaled down what

was to have become Asia's biggest mall. Instead of a high-rise building, SM decided on a sprawling two-story mall. It was supposed to open last December. But SM said that bad weather delayed the delivery of construction materials. March this year was supposed to be the new opening date, but Sy wasn't happy about opening his multibillion-peso project with only an

occupancy rate of 52 percent.

Mall of Asia general manager Steven Tan said: Sy wants to open with a bang. So they moved their calendars again, this time to May. By that time, at least 80 percent of the tenants are expected to join the launch.

When Sy opened his first mall in North EDSA in 1985, he didn't mind the brewing political unrest that led to the first People

LUIS LIWANAG

SUPER MALLS *Gross Leasable Area (in square feet)*

SOUTH CHINA MALL (Dongguan, China)	7.1 million	ARICANDUVA MALL (Sao Paulo, Brazil)	2.6 million
GOLDEN RESOURCES SHOPPING MALL (Beijing, China)	6 million	CHIA TAI SQUARE (Jiangsu, China)	2.6 million
WEST EDMONTON MALL (Alberta, Canada)	3.8 million	MALL OF AMERICA (Minnesota, USA)	2.5 million
BEIJING MALL (Beijing, China)	4.7 million	ORIENTAL PLAZA (Guangdong, China)	2.5 million
PANDA MALL (Sichuan, China)	3.2 million	SAWGRASS MILLS (Florida, USA)	2.5 million
GRANDVIEW MALL (Guangzhou, China)	3.2 million	DEL AMO FASHION CENTER (California, USA)	2.5 million
SOUTH COAST PLAZA (California, USA)	2.7 million	MALL OF EMIRATES (Dubai, UAE)	2.4 million

Source: "Shopping Mall Studies," www.easternct.edu

*The entire SM property in Bay Boulevard is 6.5 million square feet

Power revolt a year later. He continued building Megamall while the country was beset by coups in the following years. At the height of the 1997 Asian financial crisis he opened two malls. So why the delays this time? "It's different when you open a mall this size. It's complicated compared to the regular malls," said Millie Dizon, SM's marketing executive.

A Complete Mall

SM promises to make up for the delays.

The mall follows the same box-type format of SM malls. Designed by Arquitectonica—the same designing firm that did the US Federal Courthouse and Podium—the Mall of Asia consists of four buildings interconnected by walkways: the Main Mall, Entertainment Mall, and the North and South Carpark Buildings. It is so big there will be a 20-seater tram to make it easier for

shoppers to go around. The management's priority is to make sure shoppers will not get lost inside the mall. There will be two concierge desks—one in the Main Mall and another in the Entertainment Mall. Maps will be given out, and there will be signs aplenty.

While new malls in China have eclipsed its record, the Mall of Asia remains one of Asia's biggest malls. When the shops are ready in May and one tries to visit all 700 shops in the mall for just five minutes each, it will take almost two and half days to complete the rounds. That does not include checking out the cinemas, theaters, and the skating rink.

The property is positioning itself as a family mall and a complete mall.

"Whenever you have

anything to celebrate you go to the Mall of Asia," Tan said. This comes from the understanding of the Filipino shopper. "In Singapore and Hong Kong, people go to malls to buy things immediately. Here in the Philippines, they go to the mall to hang out the whole day."

A shopper will find the regular SM mall in the Main Mall, where brands like Our Home, ACE Hardware, SM Appliance Center, Bench, and French Baker shop will be found. Parallel to the Main Mall and along the bay is the Entertainment Mall where the cinemas, theaters, and restaurants are. Unlike in regular SM malls, the main dining place is not the Food Court. Restaurants like Tagaytay Highlands will be along the bay. There's also a boardwalk where shoppers can enjoy the bay after meals or the weekly fireworks. The supermarket is in the North Carpark Building and the department store is in the South Carpark Building. On the third and fourth floors of the two Carpark buildings are 5,000 parking slots.

Grand Plan

The Mall of Asia is the 27th mall of taipan Henry Sy. He has 14 malls (including the Mall of Asia) in Metro Manila, seven in Luzon, four in Visayas and Mindanao, and two in China.

His is a rags-to-riches



success story that started in a shoe store in Carriedo Street, Sta. Cruz, Manila, in the 1940s. Sy is a “very detailed person,” said Tan. “I’ve always worked with foreign companies before. Foreign companies are more lax in spending. SM is a bit too organized. But then at the end of the day, it really matters. The 10 cents that we’d be able to save, if we put it all together, becomes a big deal.”

Sy’s business acumen now puts his net worth at US\$1.5 billion (approximately P77.1 billion), making him the world’s 512th richest man, according to the *Forbes* billionaires list. The SM group earns from rent income from leases in mall stores and food courts, cinema ticket sales, and amusement income from bowling, ice skating and others. Sy is also into banking and real estate.

The Mall of Asia is just an arm of the tycoon’s “grand plan” for the 60-hectare SM property in Pasay. Right now it’s just the mall. But in no time, there will be buildings around it.

A groundbreaking ceremony was recently held for a 10-story call center building beside the mall. SM is also planning to build a trade hall bigger than the World Trade Center in Makati City and a sports arena that will rival the Araneta Coliseum in Cubao. It’s a long term development plan, Dizon said. Henry Sy is also thinking about hotels, villages, and condominiums in the site. ■



TALL ORDER

IT WAS early January this year in Paris, and **Steven Tan** was spending the end of his holiday vacation in Café Beaubourg, chatting with former classmates from the Paris School of Management, where he earned his master’s degree six years ago.

The 36-year-old Tan was taking a much-deserved break as manager of the Podium, a high-end boutique mall in Ortigas Center. Basking in pleasant memories and laughing boisterously with friends, Tan ordered his regular café au lait. Before he could finish his cup, he found himself with a new job:

as general manager of Mall of Asia—the Philippine’s biggest mall.

While sipping coffee, he got two text messages from the Philippines. The first was from SM executive vice president Teresita Sy Coson, asking if he had returned from his vacation. The second was from a colleague congratulating him for the position. “I was a bit shocked. It happened too fast,” Tan told *NEWSBREAK* two months after.

Tan got back in time for the monthly operations meeting, which all SM mall managers were asked to attend. SM president Hans Sy presided over the meeting and called him over to his office later to officially tell him of his new appointment.

It seems such a leap of faith for the Sys to hand over a sensitive job to someone who has been with them for just over a year. Tan joined SM in September 2004 as the Podium’s general manager; the Podium is a joint venture of the SM Group and the Singaporean bank Keppel.

To Tan, it’s not a matter of seniority. “It’s a matter of productivity and dedication to your work.” He was quick to impress his bosses. In his short stay, Podium enjoyed double-digit growth in revenue. Not bad at all for a first-timer in mall management.

Tan used to work in hotels. After a decade in Taiwan, he worked with Fuego Hotels and Properties. Among the hotels that he managed was the SM-owned Taal Vista Hotel in Tagaytay City. He quit the job to go

back to Europe and “see what I can start up there.” But the irresistible offer to manage Podium came. “It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

Podium is a “neighborhood mall” with a total of 15,000 shoppers a day. Most of them are from the AB socioeconomic strata, living in condominiums and posh villages in or near the area. The instruction given to him was simple: Do something about Podium. “I turned it upside down, changed a lot of tenants, and introduced younger and hipper events.”

Regular Podium customers would find Tan’s face very familiar. He knew some of them by their first names—like the executives from the Asian Development

Bank. He would watch movie premieres with them, and chat with expatriates in coffee shops. He regularly attended cocktails of cultural events, too, particularly those sponsored by the Singaporean Embassy. “I put the hotel [concept] in Podium and provided the services and amenities of a five-star hotel,” he said.

Tan concedes that the Mall of Asia is a “very big challenge.” Not only is the Pasay mall six times the size of Podium, it is marketed to the

general public—from Class A to the very broad C.

Tan went to work quickly. He immediately looked at the tenants’ profile to “see how I could

improve the tenant mix.” He enlisted a Thai restaurant among the dining experiences along the bay. Tan had spotted the resto near Rockwell, “a hole in the wall but the food is very delicious. He went to see the owner and gave her an offer she couldn’t refuse. “I talked her into opening in the mall. We have a lot of this kind of restaurant.”

Tan said he manages the Mall of Asia with the eyes of a hotel manager. “You don’t have to be small to be able to offer quality service.” He has checked the lighting of washrooms and placed a grand piano on the second floor of the Main Mall. But will he be able to make his regular rounds? There are 700 shops, seven cinemas, and three theaters in the Mall of Asia. The stamina of youth won’t fail him, but he admits that he feels the pressure:

The mall “has to break record.”

—**Carmela Fonbuena**



You don’t have to be small to be able to offer quality service.

Making Poverty History in Asia by 2015

What has become important is knowledge assistance

By **SHANTAYANAN DEVARAJAN** and **HOMI KHARAS**

ASIA IS a puzzle. China, India and several other countries are enjoying rapid economic growth. Yet some 600 million Asians—more than the entire population of Latin America—live on less than a dollar a day. But this puzzle is also an opportunity: if China and India can sustain their 8 to 10 percent annual GDP growth, and bring the rest of Asia with them, the continent with the largest concentration of poor people in the world stands a very good chance of eliminating poverty by 2015.

What will it take? The same factors that enabled Asia to achieve rapid growth in the past—domestic reforms and external assistance—but with some important changes.

All Asian countries, and especially China and India, grew rapidly by maintaining macroeconomic stability, opening up their economies to trade, and harnessing the dynamism of the private sector. The fiscal, trade, regulatory, and financial-sector reforms that made these possible should be continued and deepened.

Second, the growth needs to be more widely shared. Since 80 percent of Asia's poor live in rural areas, agricultural growth will be key. Rural infrastructure, land rights, rural credit and better prices for agricultural products—something that will be helped by a successful conclusion to the Doha Round of trade talks—will contribute to higher incomes for Asia's farmers.

Third, because of their recent rapid growth, all Asian countries are now facing infrastructure bottlenecks. From Bangladesh to China, businesses rank infrastructure as a major constraint to investment. Estimates of the amount of new infrastructure needed are around US \$250 billion annually.

But at least as important as



LUIS LUNANAG

building new infrastructure is managing existing infrastructure assets. Water tariffs are politically manipulated, utilities are inefficient and a drain on the treasury, and crucial maintenance is neglected. Better management of infrastructure, and more conducive policies, can also attract private-sector funds for building new infrastructure as the public sector will not be able to finance all of the additional \$250 billion.

Fourth, unless Asia has a healthy, skilled and productive work force, it will not be able to sustain its growth. Countries such as Pakistan and Cambodia are seeing slow progress in health and education. Regions such as northern India and western China have very high

and stubborn rates of child mortality. And countries which have achieved basic human development, such as Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Indonesia, are facing second-generation problems of education quality, secondary and tertiary education, and non-communicable diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease. Here too the problem is not just a lack of resources, but ineffective use of

resources. Tackling this problem will require strengthening the delivery of services in primary education, universities, clinics and hospitals to name a few by holding politicians and providers more accountable to citizens, especially poor citizens.

Finally, the Asian continent has been hit with a series of man-made and external shocks. While they have generally weathered these shocks and there have been very few episodes of sustained negative growth in the continent, Asian countries will have to protect the factors that helped them adjust to these shocks, including a diversified economy, low external debt, and a focus among policymakers on preventing crises.

As Asian incomes grow, financial assistance for “gap-

filling” becomes less important, except in the poorest countries. What becomes more important is knowledge assistance. But this knowledge assistance too is changing, from traditional technical assistance to joint problem-solving with governments, civil society and the private sector; from prescriptions to empirically-based policymaking.

To scale up poverty reduction, Asian governments need to know what works, and what doesn't. Impact evaluations of innovative projects, often financed by the World Bank or the UK Department for International Development, can answer this question.

Of course, the main partnership between industrial countries and developing Asia is that of trade and investment. Not only has this fueled growth on both sides, but it will continue to flourish, as Asian countries become a bigger market for European, Japanese, and American exports—and an excellent destination for foreign investment—while Asians continue to sell their products abroad.

Asia's recent economic history shows that rapid, sustained growth is possible. If this growth can be accelerated and more widely shared by deepening reforms, improving infrastructure, building human resources, and managing risks, then Asia's 600 million poor people will escape poverty in a decade.

Asia's development partners can support this transformation by strengthening knowledge assistance, while expanding trade and investment in Asia. Together in this giant continent, we can make poverty history. ■

Shantayanan Devarajan and Homi Kharas are the World Bank Regional Chief Economists for South Asia, and East Asia and the Pacific, respectively.

The CCP Dance School of Ballet Philippines

Where tradition means values, excellence, professionalism and innovation



The 37th CCP SUMMER DANCE WORKSHOP

4 April - 13 May 2006

Offering technique classes in classical and modern ballet for all levels (beginning age 4 to professional levels), courses in creative movement, improvisation, dance composition, and jazz/hip hop, as well as a specialized lecture series that includes dance injuries and prevention pedagogy, dance history, and other related topics.

SCHOLARSHIP AUDITIONS:

17 March (5pm)
18 March (11:30am)
4 April (5pm)
at the CCP Rehearsal Hall
LIMITED SLOTS AVAILABLE!



For inquiries, contact Ballet Philippines (Tuesday to Saturday only)
Cultural Center of the Philippines, Roxas Blvd., Pasay City 1307 MM
Tel. 551-1003, 551-0221, 832-3676, 832-3689/Fax 551-0144, 833-3244
Webpage: www.ballet.com.ph Email: balletphilippines@pldtdsl.net

ONLINE DATING

It's fast, cuts to the chase, and works for shy people

By CORA LLAMAS

CAN YOU find romance with the click of a mouse?

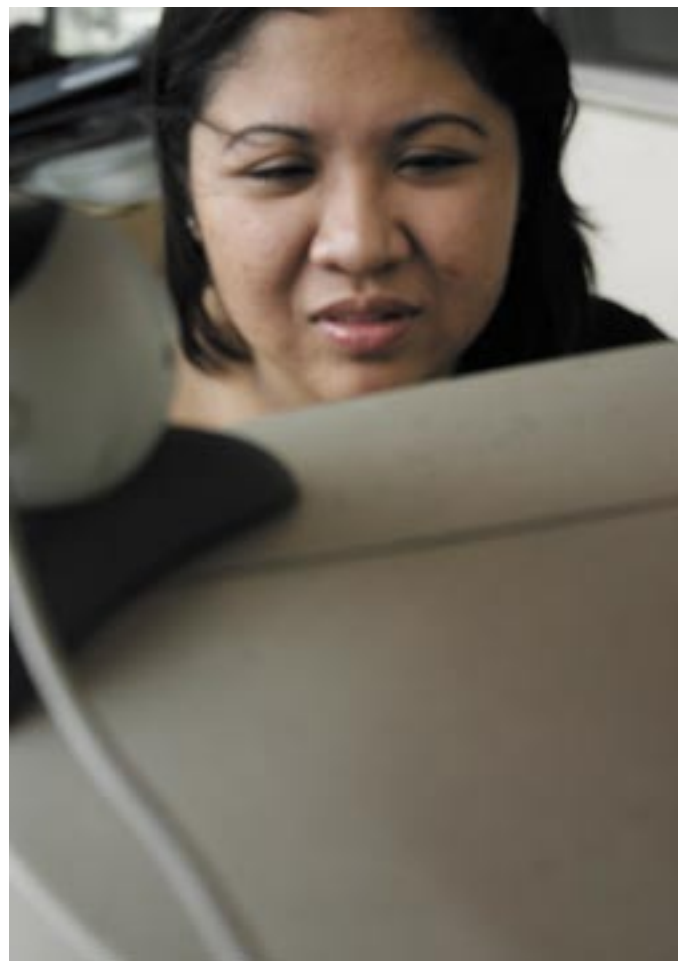
The growing number of online dating sites will tell you that a lot of people are certainly trying. The popular match.com, which has branches in almost every country including the Philippines, boasts of at least 10,000 members who come from all races, classes, countries, genders, and social backgrounds. They're as young as 18 and as old as 65. They spend hours a week hooking up in chat rooms, reading profiles of potential partners, and exchanging e-mails with those they find interesting.

And when something clicks in spite of the great distances, the interaction ranges from the fun of flirtation to the thrill of cybersex, and, just maybe, to that elusive "true love."

That till-death-do-us-part type of romance that Hollywood and greeting card romances have pushed into our collective consciousness is one of the reasons why would-be daters enter the chatrooms and join the dating sites.

As psychologist Dr. Margarita Holmes confirms, "It's true love and romance that [many people] are looking for. Some have tried real-life relationships and it doesn't work. [Meanwhile, online dating] is very intense; talking in the middle of the night can add romance and excitement. And if you [tell your chat-partner that] you only have five minutes, you don't take the steps necessary in getting to know [one another]."

That's another attraction



PAUL MATA

of online courtship. It's fast and cuts to the chase. Log on to match.com, emessenger.com, or filipinofriendfinder.com, and you can easily browse through personality profiles with accompanying pictures of people who share your interests, belong to the same profession, and more or less are the same age. If the quester is internationally inclined, he or she can easily locate a 40-year-old successful writer in New York, a 29-year-old mountain-climbing professor in Sweden, or a 58-year-old retired seaman instructor in Norway.

Initiating a move may just mean sending a one-liner

message ("Hey, you look great!") or a virtual kiss. If the person at the other end of the modem likes what he or she sees in the profile of the quester, chances are he or she will send back another short message. This can develop to lengthier e-mails or a set date in a chat room to get to know each other better. Now, if no reply is forthcoming, then the quester can move on. The silence of rejection is not quite as painful or as discouraging as the traditional kind.

INSTANT REPLIES

Dr. Holmes says that aspect of online dating encourages the participation of shyer people

who would have a hard time meeting others in a singles bar or a blind date. "This is a good way of getting to know people. You can start out slowly. You don't have to invite them for coffee. And who can reject someone for simple questioning? For shy people, this works."

Public perception would also classify the desperate and the hopelessly undatable with the simply shy, and imply that online daters are only after sex, cyber- or offline. To help sort things out, some dating sites filter out the "not serious" romancers from those looking for commitment. Eharmony.com, for example, provides the member a test-based Compatibility Report based on adaptability, romantic passion, sociability, spirituality, family goals, and self-image.

Despite the presence of cybersex Don Juans, there are some pretty busy people who try to date online who do mean business. They want immediate and substantial replies to their queries—and they move on in the face of a slow or lackluster response, or a no-show.

A couple of years ago, a debilitating if temporary illness left me with nothing but a lot of time, a PC, and two hands itching to type anything. Late-night surfing connected me with "Lars," a genial airport manager in Sweden who was divorced with two teenage daughters. Regular conversations after midnight for two hours a day (it was his lunch break, I was sick) created what seemed to be an amiable friendship, and chatting with him became a comfortable habit.

But soon, I went back to work and my odd working hours. Though I'd see him online in my Messenger box, I remained invisible and didn't initiate contact. For his part, he was sending messages asking where I was and how much he missed our chats. I was missing in action for five days—a short time for me, an age of frustration for him. When I returned

after completing one project, he wouldn't respond to my messages and chat invitations. And that was the end of it.

"Jade," a 35-year-old single mother, experienced the same break-up of sorts when she canceled a long-planned appointment with "James," a 50-year-old Australian, because of her daughter's school event. Jade and James had met in MIRC, felt that online chemistry, and chatted for months. Soon, they set up a personal meeting in the Philippines. Four days before James was about to leave Australia, Jade asked for a postponement because of parenting duties. She felt James would understand because he was also a loving and responsible father to his two teenage daughters.

Unfortunately, James didn't see it that way. Jade recounts, "He was pretty upset that I cancelled four days before when he and I had talked about this meeting for months. He felt I was just playing games and wasn't serious."

To some online daters, that personal meeting is important because it can show commitment and actual compatibility or the lack of it. Also unsaid is the need to verify what has been said or shown via picture or web cam online. In the same way that online courtship filters the pain of rejection, it can also dilute the authenticity of self-disclosure.

DON'T RUSH IT

Holmes explains that online dating "is still less work than a real-life relationship which requires self-disclosure, [of saying] I was really hurt. This getting to know you is important. If you self-disclose, that's like a dance. And the other person will self-disclose. Just a little deeper. You cannot rush these things. And sometimes people online think they can because of the nature of the communication. When you don't rush it, there are safeguards. You can see inconsistencies over time."

"Patricia," a businesswoman in her late 30s, set her

safeguards—and "Michael," a 48-year-old divorced, retired African-American military-officer turned sales manager, passed them all. Sometimes, though, cultural factors can upset the best-laid plans.

Meeting in myEmessenger.com, he was impressed by her warmth, intelligence, and kindness to his two small children; she in turn appreciated his diligence and straightforwardness. It took two years for the romance to blossom. Soon, Michael was consulting a lawyer about bringing Patricia to the US.

Then the tracing of Al-Qaeda connections to the Philippines happened. The US issued an advisory against travel to the Philippines, and the ex-military officer in Michael surfaced. "He didn't want to come here anymore. He felt we should meet in a neutral country like Singapore or Hong Kong and he offered to pay for expenses," Patricia says.

Patricia wouldn't budge. Michael should visit Manila, or else. Looking back now after two years, she says

that it was her Filipino values that prevailed. "If he loves me, why shouldn't he come here? Why should I go there?"

That relationship cooled, but Patricia is still open to meeting potential partners online, though she remains pretty selective about her choices. "Most of the people you meet just talk about ordinary stuff like their family, work, the weather. I'd like to meet someone who is a bit deeper, more sensible, who shares my interests."

It was through that approach that one of Holmes's friends finally met her husband. An active environmentalist who joined a cause-oriented newsgroup, she found a kindred spirit living in the US. Their e-mail exchanges were sparked by an intense passion for a cause, which soon carried over into mutual admiration and trust. A romance ensued.

"She's in her 50s and it's her first marriage, it's his third," Holmes remarks. They are now happily living in America. Isn't that sweet? ■

We are online!

<http://www.newsbreak.com.ph>



A PLACE TO GO BACK HOME TO

By ERIC GUTIERREZ

I WENT home to Manila recently, and have never felt this thankful for being a Pinoy. I was on a short holiday with my family after two years in Malawi—a small, impoverished southern African country. We felt like coming back to civilization.

Pinoy typically complain of the hard life, high cost of living, and want their President to resign. Frankly, I was too tired to pay attention. All we wanted was some rest, and get a respite from life in Africa. We kept our visit low-key, to avoid having to party with the whole barangay.

I live with my family in Lilongwe, the capital, which is like a small village compared to Manila. It is a city with only three traffic lights that usually do not work anyway. There are no cinemas and only five restaurants. Its entire commercial area will fit inside SM City. The irony is that despite its relative affluence, the prices of commodities in Manila are far cheaper.

As we caught up with friends and comrades, we told them our stories. Many were shocked to find that life expectancy in Malawi is only 37 years. We told them about friends and colleagues we've lost to malaria and HIV/AIDS, the country's biggest killers. We told them about the orphans, estimated at half a million, out of a population of 11 million.

The book *End of Poverty* by United Nations economist Jeffrey Sachs, describes Malawi as a "perfect storm"—a storm that brings together climatic disasters (droughts and

famines are commonplace); impoverishment (it is one of the poorest countries on the

planet); the AIDS pandemic (17 percent infection rate); and the long-standing burdens of malaria, schistosomiasis, and other diseases. The margin of survival is therefore extraordinarily narrow, hence the low life expectancy.

I work for a nongovernment organization with projects in rural villages, many of which are exactly how Sachs described one of those he visited. On arrival in one village, Sachs observed that

not a young man or woman of working age was in sight. This is because they are nearly all dead—the village is one of those devastated by AIDS. Left behind are grandmothers and orphaned children. Sachs met one grandmother forced out of retirement to take care of 15 orphaned grandchildren. When one of the kids got malaria, the aging matriarch carried the child 10 kilometers on foot to the nearest health center, only to be told to return the next day because they had run out of quinine.

Malawi is extremely poor, with a population literally struggling to survive. But its political leadership offers little help. Rather than focus on development projects, government is often locked in paralyzing political battles. An impeachment motion was

add to Sach's list—the crisis of governance.

And so for five weeks, we were away from it all. As I soaked up Manila's heat, I was pleased and thankful that for all its troubles—for all the *pulitika*, *hirap*, and *gulo*—Pilipinas is not like Malawi. We Pinoys are healthier, have better schools, and generally enjoy more opportunities. As I counted my blessings, the reality of Malawi continued to nag—why can such things happen?

When we went back to Malawi, I realized that despite everything, our life here is not too bad. The first thing my seven-year old daughter did when she arrived was to kick off her shoes and start chasing grasshoppers in our backyard. On weekends, we often go out on day trips to the lake, or to the nearby national parks to enjoy the safaris Africa is famous for. Most importantly, we value the company of friends and the nice, honest, and hardworking Malawians we've built friendships with, who have kept their honor and sense of humor despite the poverty all around.

But we're not planning to stay long, though. There is a different kind of stress here, born out of the hopelessness that is emotionally draining. Oftentimes, someone knocks at my gate asking, "*Bwana* (boss), can you give me some work, my family is hungry?" Each time, they get my polite "No, I'm really sorry, I can't help you."

I am not a Mother Teresa, and my tolerance for everyday grief here has its limits. For whatever it's worth, I am glad to have a place like Manila I can always go back home to. ■



There is a different kind of stress here, born out of the hopelessness that is emotionally draining.

filed against the President after he started corruption investigations. This delayed the passing of the national budget, which can be fatal for a country where medicines easily run out. This is another "storm" to

The author is the Regional Advocacy and Research Adviser of WaterAid in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. WaterAid (www.wateraid.org) is an international NGO dedicated to helping people escape the stranglehold of poverty caused by living without safe water and effective sanitation."

KOI VILLAGE

I THOUGHT I had misheard it. The big, orange Koi that caught my eye costs P250,000. Yup, a jaw-dropping P250,000.

You need not fret over that, however. You can still have the latest craze in town for only P100 apiece. Of course, they're tiny and maybe not as pretty as the big ones, but they're preferred by kids and by those who are just starting to have their aquariums at home. At least if they die on you, you won't feel so bad because, well, you bought them just for a hundred (pardon the thought). That said, you must buy a Koi only if you can take care of it. Kois are gentle, tame, and easy to maintain.



The Koi Village pet mall in Paseo de Magallanes on South Super Highway is worth a visit even if you have no plans of taking home a Koi. It's a delight just seeing schools of colored carp jumping over the feeds that you sprinkle on them (you can buy fish feed for P20 a bottle at the kiosk). Children will definitely enjoy feeding the Koi; they seem to be perennially hungry (the Kois, I mean). Prices range from P100 apiece to P200, P1,000, P2,000 to P5,000 to as high as P250,000.

The Koi is referred to by various names—"colored Koi," "flowery Koi," or "Nishiki Goi," which is Japan's national fish. "For some, it is a symbol of perseverance, and for others, a good luck charm," says the pet mall's brochure. "Many Koi keepers say that a school of Koi swimming in a pond is a great healer in a busy life." Check it out. Visit the Koi Village pet mall in Magallanes or call (0920)8668809 or (0922)8890837.

—Glenda M. Gloria



Soap For The Soul

ARE YOU tired of all the much-advertised soap bars that do nothing but harm your skin with their artificial elements? Wouldn't you love to step into your bathroom every morning and be greeted by the smell of fresh flowers?

The Garden Secret Health Products sells organic soap bars that cater to your needs—all natural fragrance and color. The soaps sell for an average of 40 centavos per gram; one bar costs around a hundred pesos. There's a soap for frequent travelers to the country's exotic but remote places, the Neem Plus Aloe bar, which is a cleanser and insect repellant in one piece.

If you need an anti-oxidant soap with skin exfoliating attributes, try the Aroma ni Kape Plus Green Tea soap bar, which really feels good on the skin.

These are sold in key stores in Manila (such as Rustan's) as well as in shops in Boracay. The owner, Jet Sales, has a house in Puerto Princesa, where the soap bars are also made and sold. If you're in that city, visit the Garden Secret Health products in Iratag, Barangay Irawan. For orders in Manila, call (0920)926-8361 or e-mail them at thegardenssecret@yahoo.com.

—Glenda M. Gloria



PARADISE IN THE CITY

A PLEASANT surprise for mothers in search of nice and neat parks for their kids is the La Mesa Watershed Resort and Ecological Park (Ecopark). Located in East Fairview, Quezon City, it's a smooth 25-minute drive from the Quezon City Circle outside the rush hour.

My toddler's class chose Ecopark as the site of their first field trip, and the parents had as much fun as the kids. The real come-on, aside from the pool that runs on salt water, is the chance to have long walks by the pond or

by the wild plants and flowers. The park, which lies within the 2,700-hectare La Mesa Dam watershed, is your natural kind of park; the walks are never boring and there are no well-manicured, English-inspired landscapes.

Ecopark is open daily from 8am to 5 pm. The pool is open except Mondays—from 9 am to 4pm. The entrance fee is P50, though Quezon City residents get a P10 discount. Children under 3 feet are free of charge.

—Glenda M. Gloria

Global Street Eats

Taguig seeks repeat success of Fiesta Market!

By **BAREFOOT GOURMET**

ONCE THERE was only the popular Fiesta Market! wing of Taguig's Market! Market! Mall sheltering three dozen Filipino street-food eateries under one hangar-like roof.

Now the mall owners have opened another covered outdoor mecca for street-food pilgrims called Street Market! with 25 stalls and kiosks serving global, mostly Asian, meals and snacks al fresco.

Providing visual touches are hanging Asian lanterns of different shapes and two mini Buddhist gardens. Together they give a calming effect to the place in contrast to the controlled chaos of Fiesta Market!

The list of Street Market!'s 25 eateries includes some of the oldest food suppliers in Metro Manila. The Chinese deli, Polland Hopia, a hole-in-the-wall legend at Calle Nueva in Binondo, Manila, since 1966, leads the familiar names.

Today, street-food patrollers will find Polland's five-pack hopia bestsellers with mongo, pork, ube, ube-langka, durian, and ube-queso fillings at Street Market! Prices range from P 31 to P 48 a pack. In addition, there is Polland's fresh lumpia in a box (P50). There's an occasional supply of machang, which is sticky rice with pork and nuts wrapped in leaves (P40).

Another veteran deli, Treffpunkt Jederman, rooted in Bel-Air Village in Makati since 1986, now offers its deliciously habit-forming Austrian-German sausages, salami, bacon, cold cuts, mustard, and sauerkraut in Taguig.

For street-food seekers, the place offers bratwurst, frankfurter, Hungarian and Italian sausages with whole wheat bread at prices ranging from P55 to P58.

Many of the places at Street Market! are in the "soft opening" stage. They expect to be fully operational soon.

Newcomer Yakitori King offers complete meal-bearing bento boxes in different sizes at P39 and P68.

Wa No Fu, another Japanese newcomer, has gyudon beef with rice at P 79. This is a bowl of Japanese rice with thin slices of beef, soy sauce, sake, and ginger.

DEC, a Chinese place, features crispy fried siopao and Shanghai lumpia (P25 for three pieces.)



Lord Stow's Bakery, a breakfast and brunch place said to have originated in Macau, offers Portuguese-style egg tarts fresh from the oven. There are also sandwiches and pastries.

Other places in various stages of setting up are: Hap Chan, Soo Ra Sang, Vietnam Food House, Icing's Cake and Coffee Shop, Wa No Fu, Ersao, Korokke, Koay Teow, Asian Noodles, Ho Duk, Thai Deli, Hong Kong Street Food, Wang Mart, Koji, Kindori, Takoyaki, Drink It, Sushi-ya, and

Heavens & Eggs. A few places have air-conditioned sections for those who prefer more than cooling fans.

Some of the eateries may be familiar to avid Metro Manila mall hoppers, e.g., Vietnam Food House and Sushi-ya. Vietnam Food House is a chain set up by a native of Saigon. I look forward to again tasting Sushi-ya's unagi (fresh water eel sushi).

The area has weekend live entertainment starting at 7 in the evening with pop and rock groups playing. The pop group South Border played at the Street Market! launching.

Will Street Market! be as popular as Fiesta Market!?

Correction:

Restaurateur Didi Sarmiento called to point out what she believes are inaccuracies in my article "Tasty Con-fusions."

Specifically: She is now the owner of Zucchini Vinotek and Grill in Timog, Quezon City, after she bought it from the owners of Santi's Delicatessen; the seafood risotto did not include oysters; the restaurant's steak list is not a long one; and Zucchini is neither an Italian restaurant nor a continental steak house but a place that offers "a modern European menu."

First of all, my apologies for the lapse regarding ownership. Secondly, I reviewed my notes, which said I should have written "mussels" instead of "oysters" although the latter is also used in this type of dish. Thirdly, I believe a list with beef (varied by cut and weight), veal, lamb, and fish steaks is long enough. Finally, I would like to thank Ms. Sarmiento for describing the real nature of Zucchini's menu and wish her every success. ■



HAREM GIRL and Tales of the Arabian Nights

*Istanbul has everything
for a traveling single
female: history, shops,
and nice-looking men*

By EILEEN PAAT

THE muezzins were calling for the faithful to prayer when I arrived in Istanbul that chilly spring morning. After an eight-hour plane ride from Bangkok, I was drowsy but suddenly became alert with the chilly and hazy weather.

I had always wanted to see Turkish grand palaces and harems and mosques, and all that I'd ever read about in folktales and kindergarten stories of the wonders of the Arabian Nights. So I grabbed the chance when a friend invited me to visit her homeland.

From Ataturk International Airport, it was about a one-and-a-half-hour drive to the heart of Istanbul. At first, you see wide highways, sometimes winding through hilly areas. Eventually, my friend's compact car made a turn and there we were overlooking the bright blue waters of the Sea of Marmara and the mighty Bosphorus Strait, which divides Istanbul into literally two separate continents.

Turkey is the only country in the world that's located on two continents, Europe and Asia. Istanbul is also the only city in the world that is located on two continents. The division is so amazing that my friend would always say that it was a normal daily occurrence for people to cross from Europe over to Asia and vice versa in ferries plying the Bosphorus Strait.

Hotels and Boys

I was whisked off to one of the oldest and historic districts of Istanbul the Sultanahmet area. Located on a hill, Sultanahmet hosts



the Topkapi Palace, the ancestral home of the Sultan of Turkey; the Hagia Sofia, an Orthodox cathedral converted into a Muslim mosque when Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror took over the city in 1453; the ancient Underground Cistern which Byzantine Emperor Justinian had built to store water for the city in case of a siege; and a host of other historical attractions.

A number of comfortable and budget-priced hotels grew around the area, some very quaint and accessible to major routes of transportation. I stayed in a two-star boutique hotel halfway up the hill of



Sultanahmet, a five-story edifice that has a view of the blue-green waters of the Marmara and the spires of Topkapi Palace.

After breakfast, I trudged up the hill to where Topkapi Palace and the Hagia Sofia were located. And along the way, you meet the boys!

Yup, there they were, waiting beside the road all young, all smiling, and the majority of them dead ringers for Enrique Iglesias or Rufus Sewell (obviously my favorite dark, brooding actors that could melt you like ice cream with just a look)! Residing in a country (Thailand) where many men look and act more feminine than I do, I found it downright refreshing to be smiled at and asked where I was going, what my name was, and all the other nonsense that men normally say when they see a voluptuous, Asian-looking girl walking alone in their turf.

So, sadly bidding goodbye with a come-hither look to the Rufus look-alikes and the equally handsome carpet sellers, it was time to be harem girl for a short while.

Topkapi Palace and the Hagia Sofia

The fee was US\$15, quite hefty when I compare it to the \$6.40 we pay to visit the Grand Palace in Bangkok.

Once inside the large gates, which look like the impenetrable entrance to a medieval castle, you can view the fir trees neatly standing in rows and rows of courtyard after courtyard of gardens. Seems like previous generations of sultans just kept on adding building after building during their reign. The outer court is where I took several photos of the existing foliage. The inner court is where the pavilions and rooms of the sultan were and his entourage of wives and concubines.

Topkapi Palace was built by Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror in 1459 and became the home of all the sultans for four centuries. It housed several pavilions, apartments, and courtyards; the most interesting of all was the harem.

The sultan had a great many wives and daughters, and an even greater number of concubines, 2,000 of them at one time, according to the guide. Just thinking about that made me wish to be one of the concubines while walking in the Courtyard of the Concubines, in the harem area of the Palace.

Remember to visit the Throne Room

with its blue tiled walls and the canopied throne divan, the Courtyard of the Black Eunuchs (the dark-skinned eunuchs came from Egypt, Abyssinia, and the Sudan); and the Courtyard of the Concubines. What piqued my interest further were the bathing pools of the wives and concubines at the ground level.

A few meters away is the gate of the Hagia Sofia, or "The Great Church of Christ" as it is popularly called because it was and still is the biggest Orthodox Church in Turkey. Converted into an imperial mosque by Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror during his conquest of Constantinople (ancient name of Istanbul) in 1453, the Hagia Sofia is almost 2,000 years old, built and consecrated in the year 360 by Constantine the Great. It is a remarkable feat of architecture, with its very high domed basilica and four minarets on four sides.

To view the Hagia Sofia, one must cover one's head with a scarf and enter barefoot and silent through

its tall doors. Carpets line the floor for the Muslim faithful to sit on during their prayers.

Shopping and Eating

After wandering off to the Hippodrome, we were ready to go shopping at the 15th-century Grand Bazaar. Built also by Sultan Mehmet in 1461, the Grand Bazaar is a labyrinth of alleys made of thick walls and connected by domes. Silverware, leather bags and jackets, trinkets, gold, jewelry, pots and pans, textiles everything you could think of is there. Most of the alleys are air-conditioned, much to my surprise.

Bargaining is a skill here and to my surprise, a pleasant challenge, too.

The rule of thumb is to halve the price. After the usual banter and light haggling, I was able to purchase a blue "evil eye" pendant on a silver setting. The "evil eye" is a blue stone with a white dot in the middle to look like an eye and worn by Turkish and other eastern European people to ward off evil influences. The price was reasonable for such a beautiful piece of silverwork and one that is hard to find elsewhere.

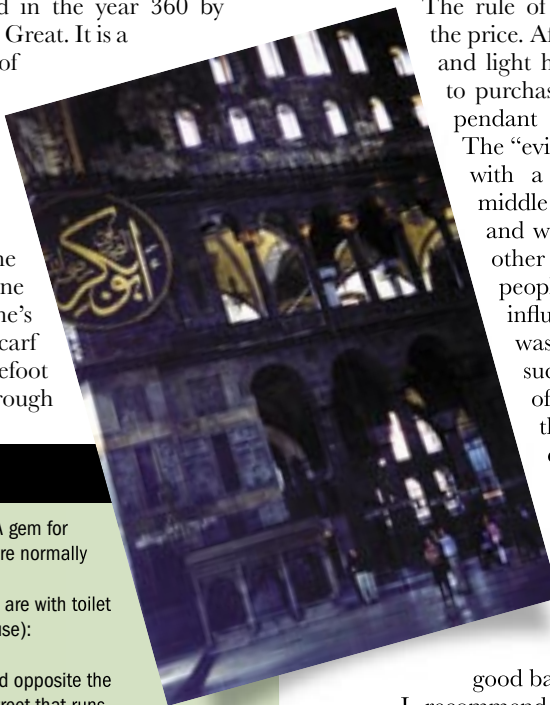
The important thing to remember with Turkish sellers: smile a lot and make them feel that they also got a

good bargain with you.

I recommend eating at a good and famous restaurant on the way up the Sultanahmet hill. Now called "Lale Restaurant," it was, as early as the 1960s, known as the "Pudding Shop." The dishes, mostly cooked in extra virgin oil with herbs and a little bit of spices, are heavenly. My favorite: the eggplants stuffed with ground meat and cooked in a little olive oil.

Then there's Turkish coffee and Turkish tea. Turkish coffee, served in demitasse cups, is very strong, thick and keeps you wide awake for hours. Not all of the Turkish people drink it, either.

But I love Turkish tea. I could drink Turkish tea every hour. For the traditional Turkish tea, two pots are used, one on top of the other. Most Turkish people, especially the shop owners, would courteously offer tea to visitors. ■



WHERE TO STAY

ONE OF the best resource for hotels is "Hostelworld" (www.hostelworld.com). A gem for single independent women travelers like me, Hostelworld.com booking rates are normally 20-30 percent cheaper than most online hotel bookings.

Here are a few recommendations in the Sultanahmet area (all listings here are with toilet and shower in the room, Turkish breakfast, and sometimes even free Internet use):

PARIS HOTEL & HOSTEL

Catch the Sirkeci tram which starts from the bottom of Sultanahmet hill and opposite the train station. Get off at Cemberlitas, near the corner of Divan Yolu (the main street that runs through Sultanahmet) and Peykane Sokak Street. Around 200 meters down Peykane Street is the hotel. Singles at US\$24, doubles at \$35.

MARMARA GUEST HOUSE

This is nearer the Marmara Sea. Great views from the rooftop of the blue Marmara Sea (and for the rest of the places I've mentioned). Singles at \$37.17, doubles at \$55.

NAZ WOODEN HOUSE INN

It's a residential area with great views of the Marmara and the Blue Mosque. A bit premium-priced. Aside from the exclusivity of the place (only 7 rooms), it's also 130 years old, built on the remaining wall of an ancient Byzantine house. Singles at \$70, doubles at \$90.

HOTEL ARARAT

From this hotel you can see the Blue Mosque. An avant-garde establishment with most rooms adorned with murals of Turkey's famous Nikos Papadakis. The attraction is its proximity to most tourist sights. Singles or doubles at 65 euros; rooms with a view of the Blue Mosque at 75 euros. Book at www.ararathotel.com.

YASMAK SULTAN HOTEL

This is a walking distance from the Sirkeci train stop, Topkapi Palace, and Hagia Sofia. What used to be a two-star hotel before is now a four-star property. All amenities are here, including a gym and a hamam onsite. Voted Best Boutique Hotel. Singles at \$66.25, doubles at \$90.

APRICOT HOTEL

A three-star hotel very conveniently placed 3-4 blocks from Topkapi Palace. It's in the middle of a host of restaurants and commercial establishments. Doubles at 38 euros. — **Eileen Paat**



IT TAKES A WOMAN

SINCE THE Philippine Left split into at least six groups in the early 1990s, it has been almost impossible to bring even their leaders into a meeting, much less agree on common strategies and tactics.

But thanks to GMA's threat of martial law-part 2, various shades of the Philippine Left succeeded in holding a unified march during International Women's Day last March 8. Nearly 10,000 participated in the well-organized "Martsa ng Kababaihan" (Women's March) along Ayala Avenue. They were also able to issue a unity statement, "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle."

They were joined by the Black

& White Movement, Bro. Eddie Villanueva's Bangon-Women, Puwersa ng Masang Pilipino of former President Joseph Estrada, the pro-FPJ groups, and concerned women from the middle and upper classes.

One leader said it was probably the first time since the split that the major shades of the Philippine Left met, agreed to hold a common protest action, and issued a unity statement. She said the Left also found common ground in supporting Edsa 2 but that was spontaneous rather than planned.

Sources among the women leaders from the "reaffirm" or pro-Sison left (e.g., Gabriela

and the "rejectionist" Left (e.g., Laban ng Masa) told NEWSBREAK it's easier for women to set aside ideological and tactical differences for the sake of unity against the "threat of fascism." One leader said women have more "social capital" than men. Thus, they have greater capacity for mutual trust and respect. She said it's more difficult for men to achieve unity because of their tendency toward "one-upmanship."

The women leaders said they would use the goodwill developed from the Women's March to try to achieve unity not just among women's groups but of all groups opposed to one of their own, Mrs. President. ■

NEW GOLFING BUDDIES

JOEY MARQUEZ is preparing to return to Parañaque City Hall, and how!

The comedian is reportedly trying to court the support of **First Gentleman Mike Arroyo**, apparently convinced by the experience of many politicians in 2004 that it pays to be closely associated with the presidential spouse—you know, the necessary logistical assistance to win an election.

So lately, Marquez has been frequently "taking out" Big Mike, having rounds of golf with him, among other things that are of interest to Mr. Arroyo.

Marquez served as mayor for nine years, but lost when he ran for congressman in 2004. It will be interesting to see how his bid to get the FG on his side will play out. What we know is that the incumbent mayor, Florencio "Jun" Bernabe, enjoyed Mr. Arroyo's support in the last election. ■



UNEXPLAINED SILENCE

THE ARMED Forces top brass has not been transparent at all about what happened in the hours leading to the failed coup of February 24. They've been engaged in double-talk.

In the afternoon of February 24, when they held a press conference in Camp Aguinaldo, Armed Forces chief of staff **Gen. Generoso Senga** was categorical in declaring that relieved Scout Ranger Regiment commander Brig. Gen. Danilo Lim and Marine Col. Ariel Querubin met with him on the night of February 23. Take note: that Senga alone met with the two. The AFP boss never mentioned that there were other key generals with him in that meeting.

But after their long silence, they were forced to clarify reports about that night. Now comes the version of Army chief Lt. Gen. Hermogenes Esperon. "Later on,

he (Senga) called General Lim and Colonel Querubin before us and we ended the meeting with a warning from the chief of staff that if they insisted on doing what they would do, I understood from what I heard from the chief of staff that we will use force to stop that unauthorized activity."

The AFP top brass never mentioned this during their February 24 press conference—that all of them sat down with the plotters. Why would they be silent on this? What's so wrong with admitting that the chief of staff had asked his major service commanders to sit down with and listen to officers planning to withdraw support from the President? Nothing really. It's just that this doesn't happen elsewhere, which says a lot about the kind of leadership the military has now. ■



COVERING THE 'AMERICAN'

IF YOU were one of those tuned in to a particular radio station during the Marines standoff in Fort Bonifacio last February 26, you were probably so curious or excited you could have had a heart attack when the reporter in the field barked to his anchor, "*May Amer'kanong dumating* (An American has just arrived)!"

Quickly, the reporter thrust his phone toward the American for a live interview. "Sir, so what is the stand of the US Embassy?" he asked. Of course, the American didn't answer, primarily and only because he's not American—he's Inigo Zobel, son of the

late industrialist Enrique and a good friend of Marine Col. Ariel Querubin.

A female anchor, who was suddenly sent to the field, was more subtle and resourceful. She phoned her station and asked who that mestizo the cameras caught entering the camp was. Apparently told who he was, the girl asked again the person on the other end of the line to verify, "Inigo?"

By that time, however, Mr. Zobel was beside the girl. Ms. Pretty Face immediately greeted Mr. Pretty Boy as if she knew him personally: "O, Inigo, what are you doing here?" Now that's a reporter. ■



THE OTHER CRUZ

MEET THE alter ego of Defense Secretary Avelino "Nonong" Cruz Jr., **Rodel Cruz**. They're not related but, judging from Rodel's career in public service, they're inseparable. He goes where his boss gets assigned.

Rodel, a former partner of The Firm and No. 8 in his UP College of Law class (he graduated *cum laude* in his undergrad), worked with Avelino Cruz Jr. when the latter was the President's legal counsel. When Avelino Cruz Jr. was moved to the defense department, he took in Rodel as his

undersecretary for legal and priority concerns. All other concerns that are not covered by the various DND officials fall on his lap.

It's an interesting

relationship: Rodel isn't treated as a junior functionary but rather as an equal although the age gap is a bit wide. A father of three toddlers, Rodel is 37; his boss is 53. Rodel, we hear, looks out for his boss,

and during meetings, reads people for their motives and what they really want from the defense secretary.

There's an element of brotherhood here: both belong to the Sigma Rho fraternity. And Rodel is a fan. At the end of the day, he really likes working for his boss

whom he once described as someone who is "good for the country."

That's subjective. But let's wait and see what happens at the DND and AFP. ■



MYSTERY DEATH IN SINGAPORE

A BROADSHEET reported in February that a Filipino domestic helper committed suicide in Singapore by jumping out of a building, her employer's condominium.

The report said, however, that the victim's head was "intact and had no fractures, except for bruises and contusions." The same news report quoted a relative as saying that there were "glaring inconsistencies" in the death reports of the "Singaporean and Philippine embassies."

The victim was buried in a northern Luzon province in early February, the report said.

NEWSBREAK learned that the Singapore Embassy in Manila has not issued any "death report" and that they couldn't find any confirmation of the suicide from the police in Singapore. Baffled by the report, the embassy asked the newspaper for clarification so they could check out the story further.

So far, there's been no reply. ■

CARNAPPERS BEWARE!

you can't run

you can't hide

• ALARM • IMMOBILIZE • TRACK

GOTCHA!

VEHICLE SECURITY CONTROL

a product of

ants

830-0911

info@ants.ph

www.ants.ph

NOW, FOR ONLY P8,900!

ADVANCED 10-MONTHS SUBSCRIPTION OF DREAM 890

GET A

FREE

DIGITAL
SATELLITE
RECEIVER
AND DISH

LET YOUR DIGITAL DREAMS COME TRUE!



CLARO.
WHEREVER!

Call 918-8000

ALL-NEW FREE-B! 8900

EXCLUSIVE OF INSTALLATION FEE

PAMPANGA (045) 893-2363 • LAGUNA (049) 545-7219 • CEBU (032) 343-8946 • BACOLOD (034) 434-0168
ILOILO (033) 335-1344 • DAVAO (082) 235-3615 • CAGAYAN DE ORO (088) 856-8588